A "THIRD POSSIBILITY" REVOLUTION:

THE SUCCESS OF ÉMIGRÉ REPORTING NETWORKS AT RADIO FREE EUROPE

DURING POLAND'S 1956 THAW

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When I told my Mom that I was writing my thesis about Radio Free Europe, she was quick to mention the REM song of the same title. Always looking for an excuse to remind me that she, too, spent her time in college as a student DJ, the REM callback provided the perfect segue to discussing her glory days at WUTS 91.3 FM. While REM is not the inspiration behind this thesis, I would be remiss if I did not begin these acknowledgements by thanking my family for their encouragement. Throughout this project, my time at Carolina, and over the past twenty-one years they have opened numerous doors, offered plenty of advice, and always been there to suggest the perfect Bruce Springsteen song to focus my energies. Thank you.

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency (United States)

CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union

The Crusade – The Crusade for Freedom

FEC – Free Europe Committee

RFE – Radio Free Europe

PZPR – Polish United Worker's Party

INTRODUCTION
"RADIO AS AN INSTRUMENT OF LIBERATION"[1]

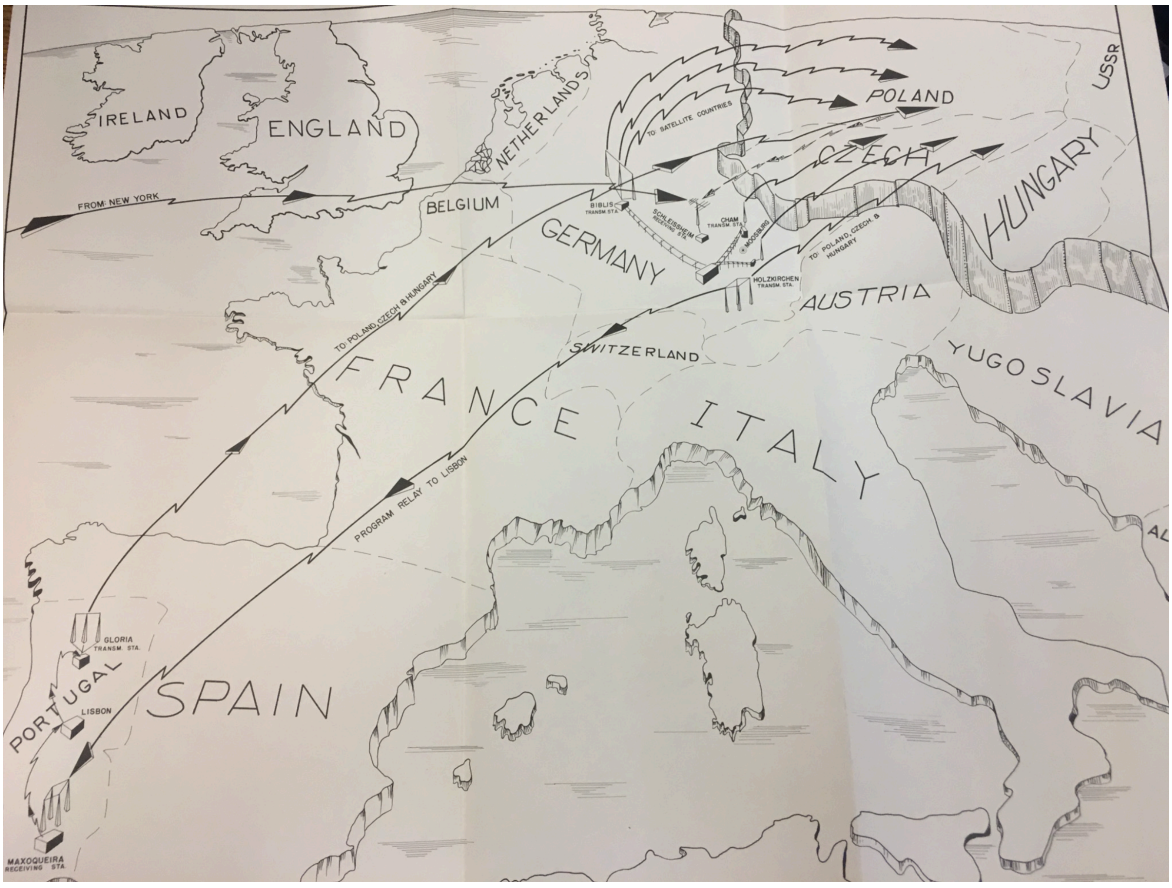

Figure 1: A map of Radio Free Europe's transmission network circa 1954. The arrows designate station transmitters in Portugal, signals sent to Eastern Europe, and the station's New York administration. Photograph, September 1, 1954, Box 162, Folder 454, Frank Altschul Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Columbia University, New York, NY.

Asked about the importance of Radio Free Europe to the end of communism in Poland in 1989, Solidarity leader Lech Wałęsa retorted, "Would there be an earth without the sun?"[2] Vital to

1. Letter from Frank Altschul to Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, March 10, 1950, Folder 5, Box 67, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk Collection, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Palo Alto, California.

2. Solidarity was founded in 1980 as a union of shipyard workers. As the first independent labor union in the Soviet sphere, Solidarity quickly gained momentum and set a precedent of civil disobedience in Poland and for the communist bloc. In 1989 Solidarity was invited to negotiate with the government, paving the way for Wałęsa's election as president in 1990—marking the end of communism in Poland. For a brief timeline of the Solidarity movement, see Jason Burke, "Divided Poland falls out over Solidarity," May 30, 2009, *The Guardian*. For more information on the role of Radio Free Europe in the Solidarity movement, see Michael Nelson's *War of the Black Heaven.* Quote from "Poland's Walesa Addresses RFE/RL Fund Conference," Shortwaves, Nov. 1989, 1, as quoted in Michael Nelson, *War of the Black Heavens* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 159-160.

securing a peaceful end of the Cold War, Radio Free Europe was an American-financed radio station that encouraged the end of communism in East-Central Europe through anti-communist broadcasts. The station's role in Cold War politics can be traced back to its early years. Upon its founding, Radio Free Europe broadcast in three countries: Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland. Hiring émigré journalists to report to their home countries, the station served as an alternative home radio service that challenged the monolithic voice of party-dominated domestic press agencies behind the Iron Curtain. The station operated uniquely at the nexus of American political motives and East European autonomy as it struggled to balance these twin influences over the course of its early years.

From its founding, Radio Free Europe grappled with its identity as both a self-described American "propaganda instrument" and a voice for East European émigré interests.[3] The Station was the brainchild of George Kennan, the author of the famous "X" article, an anonymous essay published in *Foreign Affairs* that framed the Cold War as a test of American "moral and political leadership" and outlined the containment doctrine.[4] Through Kennan's influence and with the support of the United States' Congress, the station emerged from the epicenter of American Cold War political thought.[5] Vehemently anti-Soviet, many of the station's first directors and funders directly experienced Soviet oppression as prisoners of war and commanders in East Europe during World War II.[6] Understanding the challenges posed to free media by the Soviet Union and the communist governments in Eastern Europe, and seeking ways to utilize Eastern

3. Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Liberty*, (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 2000), 6.

4. The containment doctrine was a US foreign policy initiative during the Cold War that aimed to prevent the spread of communism abroad. George Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," Speech, July 1947, Foreign Affairs Magazine https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russian-federation/2016-10-31/sources-soviet-conduct-excerpt; Puddington, 8.

5. Annika Frieberg, "The Project of Reconciliation: Journalists and Religious Activists in Polish-German Relations, 1956-1972," PhD diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008, 42.

6. Puddington, 8.

European émigrés for American political advantages, these politicians sought to undercut communist ideology without military or political force. The ultimate psychological warfare project, Radio Free Europe aimed to exert "soft power" over the Soviet Union and communist sphere through broadcasting an alternative to party line communist ideology in communist bloc countries.[7]

This vision for Radio Free Europe was enumerated by former United States Senator and soon to be Secretary of State John Foster Dulles in December 1949 at the renowned New York Town Hall, a hub of New York political discourse since the suffragette movement. Dulles proposed a Radio Free Europe that "would provide patriotic leaders in exile with asylum and with opportunity to help keep the flames of freedom burning in their home countries, and which would develop the use of non-military techniques to counter the methods of the police state."[8] Dulles' initial remarks on the station proposed a political instrument that, while incorporating émigré voices, existed as a brainchild, representative, and project of American foreign policy. This conflict of interest was present in the station's earliest mission statements, which proved contradictory in promising to broadcast the "living voices of democratic exiled leaders" and serve as an "official organ of government" for the United States.[9]

The 1956 upheavals in Eastern Europe emerged in the midst of these internal challenges surrounding Radio Free Europe's identity. A landmark year in world politics, 1956 was transformative in both Soviet-sphere and global politics. Destalinization in Moscow, a

7. Terence H. Qualter was one of the first political scientists to examine psychological warfare, a phenomenon that was not extensively used or studied until at least the First World War. This thesis will use Qualter's definition of psychological warfare, defining the phenomenon as propaganda that demoralizes an enemy, discourages neutrals from joining this enemy, and preserves morale at home. Terence H. Qualter, *Propaganda and Psychological Warfare*, (New York, NY: Random House, 1962), xi-xii.

8. John Foster Dulles, "The Pursuit of Liberty," December 13, 1949, Folder 5, Box 67, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk Collection.

9. Puddington, 17-19.

militarized uprising in Hungary, and the Suez Crisis in Egypt dominated the attention of American and NATO actors. Often overlooked, Poland's 1956 crisis occurred gradually and with comparatively less international media attention.[10] Scholars do not agree upon the magnitude of Poland's 1956 crisis, with the riots, regime change, and overarching unrest earning every label from a mere "social movement" to a full scale "Revolution."[11] This ambiguity alone suggests that there is more to be understood in relation to Poland's 1956.

Balancing social dissatisfaction with an astute understanding of the potential for Soviet military intervention, the Polish people operated cautiously and with resolve in delivering political change. While the Hungarian crisis is praised for the speed and scale at which the public mobilized, Soviet intervention ultimately squashed this revolution.[12] In light of Hungary, Poland's 1956 is remarkable for its cautious victory. Marked by a successful regime change and a number of liberalizing reforms to communism, Poland's revolution was a triumph of public organizing. As a Soviet-aligned state with a longstanding history of tension with its Russian neighbors, Poland's working-class rejection of Soviet-style communism in 1956 provided the framework decades later for Solidarity's grassroots organizing that successfully overthrew communism in the 1980s.

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10. For a complete overview of the political buildup, events, and outcome of the 1956 thaw, see Paweł Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956*, (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009).

11. Throughout my reading, Poland's 1956 is labeled as a revolution, social movement, thaw, crisis, "cold" coup d'etat, and regime change, among other names. In part, the variety of terms used to discuss Poland's 1956 is due to the volume of competing interests writing and discussing these events, including but not limited to the American government, American media, Polish government, Polish media, Radio Free Europe, and the academic community. Each of these terms brings with it a number of implications. Yet, by the close of 1956, Polish journalists at Radio Free Europe and within Poland consistently referred to the events as a thaw, crisis, and peaceful revolution. Deferring to the language of these Polish journalists, this thesis will interchangeably use these three terms to describe the 1956 crisis; Ryszard Turski and Eligiusz Lasota, "The Polish October," Po Prostu, October 28, 1956, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36, Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences, New York, NY.

12. For expertise on the Hungarian Crisis of 1956, including Radio Free Europe's controversial broadcasts arousing false hopes of Western aid, consult Johanna Cushing Granville's *The First Domino: International Decision Making During the Hungarian Crisis*, among the full body of Granville's scholarly work. Johanna Cushing Granville's *The First Domino: International Decision Making During the Hungarian Crisis*, (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004).

This thesis argues that Polish émigré journalists at Radio Free Europe were essential to the station's mission and Polish broadcasts throughout the first part of the 1950s, culminating in the 1956 thaw. The first chapter focuses on how American interests ceded authority to Polish voices at Radio Free Europe throughout the early 1950s. Here, I examine the relationship between the Polish listenership and Polish émigré community. Establishing the importance of Polish émigré reporters to the station's mission, I recreate the "information loop" through which information on life and politics in Poland both entered and exited the country. Turning to the June 1956 Poznań riots, Chapter Two argues that Polish émigré journalists and Poles in Poland drew on a collective national consciousness to advocate for gradual communist reform. In this chapter I delve into Polish fears of Soviet military intervention, noting how the Polish community remained apprehensive of pursuing violent revolution. In this, I outline the process by which American administrators ceded authority to Polish journalists during of the riots. The third and final chapter focuses on the events surrounding Władysław Gomułka's rise to power in October 1956. In this chapter I examine how émigré journalists successfully translated Polish public opinion into broadcast policy. Here, I detail how Radio Free Europe's policy assisted the success of Gomułka's thaw. Using its platform to facilitate the thaw, 1956 proved essential to solidifying Radio Free Europe as a news source for Poles, by Poles.

Much of the existing historiography surrounding communist politics in Poland, 1956, and Radio Free Europe does not delve into the station's role in the 1956 crisis. Many scholars of Radio Free Europe are former employees of the station, with most offering longitudinal overviews of the station's complete Cold War history without a country or time-specific focus. Former Radio Free Europe Director A. Ross Johnson's *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: The CIA Years and Beyond* is the most complete analysis of the station's first twenty years,

though Johnson largely situates his conversation within the boundaries of station funding and its concealed relationship with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).[13] Broadening this discussion to focus on the station's American political loyalties, former New York Bureau Deputy Director Arch Puddington's *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* serves as the most authoritative source on the station's founding. Puddington provides a firm foreground for understanding the politics of the station's daily operations in the United States and abroad.[14] Despite the important role of the station during the June Poznań protests and installation of Władysław Gomułka in October 1956, scholars of Radio Free Europe rarely examine the station's Polish operations during this period. Instead, this conversation almost exclusively serves as a segue to discussing the Hungarian Revolution. The primary weakness of this historic canon is its inability to address the importance of 1956 to Poland and, in turn, recognize Radio Free Europe's essential role in facilitating this nonviolent revolution.

As early as 1957 those at Radio Free Europe identified this schism in international attention. Seeking to accurately understand and promote the station's influence in Poland's crisis, American political staffer William Griffith wrote to his supervisors, "[T]here has been so much discussion about RFE's role in the Hungarian Revolution that I think that our role in the Polish coup d'etat of October has been unfortunately neglected."[15] Despite the lack of recognition, it

13. A. Ross Johnson, *Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty: the CIA years and beyond* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010).

14. Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Liberty*.

15. As noted prior, I do not classify the 1956 crisis as a coup. Using Romanian Political Scientist Edward Luttwak's widely accepted definition outlined in his 1968 handbook *Coup D'État: A Practical Handbook* a coup "is not assisted by the intervention of the masses" nor does it "imply any particular political orientation." The 1956 thaw occurred with considerable public support, exemplified during Poznań. Gomułka explicitly advocated for destalinization and was a member of the Polish Communist Party by October 1956. In this, the 1956 crisis in Poland cannot be considered a coup as it occurred both because of the masses and with a clear political orientation. Edward Luttwak, *Coup D'État: A Practical Handbook*, 2nd ed, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 11; Emphasis included in original message. Memorandum from William Griffith to Lewis Galantiere, "RFE Performance in Poland During and After Gomułka's Coup D'Etat," March 6, 1957, Folder 6, Box 17, Arch Puddington Collection, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California.

was Radio Free Europe's reports of the Poznań uprising and Gomułka's thaw that eventually sparked the revolution in Hungary later that October.[16] It is vital to examine the station's role in the Polish thaw in order to understand the full scope of Radio Free Europe's influence over East European politics in 1956.

To grasp the impact of Radio Free Europe on the 1956 crisis, it is important to consider the role of Polish émigré communities in Europe and the United States in the 1950s. During and following World War II a string of Polish émigrés established roots in the West, most recognizably through the Home Army, the Polish government-in-exile in London.[17] By 1956, more than 700,000 Poles lived in France, with 400,000 of these Poles holding French citizenship. 200,000 Poles lived in Germany at this time, and another 150,000 lived in Belgium and the Netherlands. While some of these émigrés were refugees, others emigrated for social and political reasons. Many of these émigrés were peasants, held anti-communist political beliefs, and maintained close connections with friends and family in Poland.[18] While no longer living in Poland, these émigrés actively sought an anti-communist future for Poland.

It was these same émigrés who urged the United States State Department to found Radio Free Europe, and ultimately staffed the station. Writing to the American State Department asking for a medium to earn "sympathy, [and] understanding" in the West and ignite a "spark of hope" in Poland, the station and its broadcasts relied on the passion and resolve of its émigré journalists.[19] It is of note that, throughout my archival research, there was little biographical information or details surrounding the names and stories of these émigré journalists themselves.

16. Johnson, 87.

17. For information on the founding and duties of the government-in-exile, see David G. Williamson, *The Polish Underground 1939-1947* (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2012), 10-14.

18. Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, "The Need for the Intensification of the Anti-Communist Activity in Europe," March 16, 1956, Folder 5, Box 68, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk Collection.

19. Johnson, 12.

Due to this scarcity of émigré sources, this thesis primarily relies on unattributed station files, Polish politicians, and the documents of American administrators at Radio Free Europe in order to knit together the experiences of Polish émigré journalists.

These émigré journalists' sense of responsibility for the Polish community at-large falls within a broader arc of Polish nationhood. Polish national mythology describes a history of constant persecution and, in turn, a series of romanticized revolutions defending the Polish people. Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz framed this national myth as a messianic sacrifice, with "Poland's destiny, its fall, and upcoming liberation (…) as a social-historical reflection (or even fulfillment) of the biography of Jesus."[20] This national myth of Poland as the "Christ of Nations" manifested itself multiple times over the long nineteenth century through popular revolutions.[21] In the twentieth century, during and after the Second World War, the examples of the wartime Home Army and later émigré inquiries to the US State Department underscore that this strong Polish perception of nationalism and sense of shared fate did not end when these émigrés left Poland. Instead, these émigré communities sought ways to support the Polish nation from abroad. Radio Free Europe, in this context, emerged as a tool for the Polish national community to unite across the Iron Curtain. The station proved an essential venue for Polish émigrés and Poles in Poland to connect and discuss politics and culture. Employing American resources to their advantage, the émigré community utilized Radio Free Europe as a venue for national conversation and ultimately revolution in 1956.

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20. Gerhard Wagner, "Nationalism and Cultural Memory in Poland: The European Union Turns East," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 17, no. 2 (Winter 2003), 205.

21. Delving into the origins of Polish romanticism and rise of the "Christ of Nations" myth, Marysia Galbraith assesses Polish self-identity and this national mythology from an anthropological perspective. See Marysia H. Galbraith, *Being and Becoming European in Poland: European Integration and Self-Identity*, (New York, NY: Anthem Press, 2014), 196.

CHAPTER ONE
AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, ÉMIGRÉ REPORTERS, AND INFORMATION LOOPS:
THE EARLY YEARS OF THE POLISH DESK

Figure 2: A Crusade for Freedom cartoon depicting the power of Radio Free Europe in fighting communist ideology. Crusade for Freedom, "Another War?" Folder 1, Box 37, Paul Henze Papers. The Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Palo Alto, California.

About a week after the close of the 1952 presidential election in the United States, the new President-elect Dwight Eisenhower and the recently defeated Democratic Candidate Governor Adlai Stevenson recorded a broadcast for all major news networks across the United States. Lauding the importance of Radio Free Europe (RFE) in the fight against communism, the two candidates presented the station as the sole entity able to "supply the truth" of democracy to

communist Europe.[22] Introduced by Henry Ford II, then-President of Ford Motor Company, the broadcast reflected a star-studded united front of American politicians and businesses standing against communism in support of the station's broadcasting.

This broadcast was sponsored by the Crusade for Freedom, the public fundraising arm for RFE's parent organization the Free Europe Committee. As the public interface between the station and everyday Americans, the Crusade encouraged grassroots-level anti-communist activism primarily through individual donations to the Free Europe Committee. Camouflaging the money being donated to the Free Europe Committee by the CIA, the Crusade's fundraising efforts intended to both secure significant funding for the Committee and gain American public support for anti-communism.[23]

Groups like the Crusade and Free Europe Committee took a hardline approach to anticommunism, and actively pursued policies at Radio Free Europe to encourage the end of communism and liberation of East-Central Europe. While "liberation" rhetoric aligned with US foreign policy interests, many of the Polish émigré reporters who worked at Radio Free Europe were more cautious in their approach to anti-communism. Comprising the backbone of Radio Free Europe, these émigré reporters were essential to the station's mission to "serve as the voice of internal opposition."[24] Over the course of the early 1950s American administrators and editors were forced to grapple with the more cautious approach of Polish émigrés journalists. In close contact with and heavily influenced by listeners in Poland, Polish émigrés came to challenge the hardline anticommunist policies of American station administrators and the US government.

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22. Crusade for Freedom Memo, November 11, 1952, Box 161, Folder 452, Frank Altschul Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Columbia University, New York, NY.

23. Puddington, 22.

24. Johanna Granville, "Radio Free Europe and International Decision Making During the Hungarian Crisis of 1956," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television*, 24, no. 4, (2010): 590.

The Crusade for Freedom

One of the key ways that the Crusade earned public support was through celebrity appeals to the American people. Stevenson, Eisenhower, and Ford's November 1952 broadcast reflected this process. The broadcast demonstrated a willingness of social, business, and political leaders to take a stand against communism. In its public-relations statements the Crusade touted its "full approval" from "leaders of American industry, agriculture, labor, education, government, religion, culture, [and] science" for its efforts to support psychological warfare.[25] Whether by enlisting respected journalists to record 30-second announcements in support of RFE, or through distributing mass mailing newsletters with slapstick anti-communist jokes, the Crusade aimed to be accessible and inviting in its interactions with the American public.[26]

Despite a lighthearted public façade, the Crusade often used extreme, sensationalist terminology to depict communism. The Crusade's newsletters and American radio broadcasts framed the fight against communism as a fight against the Kremlin's efforts to turn "unfortunate millions" into "soldiers against the free world." The Crusade's mailings to prospective donors played on fears of armed conflict by portraying Radio Free Europe broadcasts as a key determinant in preventing a "shooting war" with the Soviet Union. In this, the fundraising group acted as a rabble-rousing entity in its support for RFE programming.[27] These tactics proved effective, with the Crusade netting $2 million annually for the Free Europe Committee by the mid-1950s.[28]

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25. Advertising Council, "Crusade for Freedom Leadership and Fund-Raising Drive (November 11-December 15, 1952)," Folder 452, Box 161, Frank Altschul Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection at Columbia University, New York, NY.

26. "Crusade for Freedom Weekly Newsletter," Folder 454, Box 162, Frank Altschul Papers; *Crusade for Freedom,* "News From Behind the Iron Curtain," Folder 483, Box 165, Frank Altschul Papers.

27. Advertising Council, "Crusade for Freedom Leadership and Fund-Raising Drive (November 11-December 15, 1952)," Folder 452, Box 161, Frank Altschul Papers.

28. Johnson, 14-15.

Internally, however, this approach sparked opposition from RFE administrators. Feeling that the Crusade's sensationalism restricted the station from taking a more gradual approach to anti-communism, Free Europe Committee Counselor Lewis Galantiere noted in 1956 that the Crusade "oversimplified" RFE's purpose by presenting the radio station as "fighters of evil against communism and nothing else."[29] The gradualist approach to anti-communism that Galantiere referenced necessitated a conservative path toward destalinization and increased democratization, as not to provoke a potential armed response from the Soviet Union during a year of upheaval across Eastern and East Central Europe. This path of communist reform stood in contrast to the Crusade's hardline anti-communist messaging. In framing the radio station's intentions as solely fighting communism, at all costs, the Crusade fostered a public persona of America's policy toward Eastern Europe as one of unwavering opposition.

RFE's internal dissatisfaction with how the Crusade portrayed the station paralleled broader incoherencies within the radio station's structure. The Crusade for Freedom's board heavily overlapped with that of the Free Europe Committee.[30] With similar administrations, the two institutions shared analogous visions for the goal of Radio Free Europe broadcasts that contradicted the approach of the Polish journalists and editors who shaped the broadcasts. This vision was best framed by Free Europe Committee Director C.D. Jackson in 1951 when he noted in *The New York Times* that RFE's purpose was to "create conditions of inner turmoil" within the Communist bloc.[31] Comments such as Jackson's directly addressed the tensions existing between the purpose of Crusade funding and Free Europe Committee oversight, and the purpose of station broadcasts.

29. Johnson, 46.
30. Puddington, 21.
31. Jack Raymond, "Radio Free Europe Spurring Escapes," *The New York Times*, November 25, 1951, 22.

American political and business interests threatened Polish journalist's autonomy over their broadcasts. Per Radio Free Europe's mission, broadcasts were shaped by East European émigrés who worked at the station. In the early 1950s, however, American oversight often eclipsed the desires of these East European journalists. In this, the Crusade and the Free Europe Committee's hardline anti-communism challenged the station's central mission of providing East European émigrés with a platform to share anticommunist news and act as a "voice of internal opposition" within their homelands.[32] In 1950 Free Europe Committee radio policy subcommittee chair and prominent New York banker Frank Altschul acknowledged this threat, questioning "To what extent is Radio Free Europe the voice of Polish émigré groups, rather than the voice of American citizens using émigré groups to the maximum advantage?"[33] As this division became increasingly evident, it became clear that the outcome of Altschul's question would be determined not by RFE officers in the United States, but by those closest to the events in Poland—the Polish desk, émigrés from Poland, and listeners in Poland.

American Oversight of the Polish Desk

This structural divide between Radio Free Europe's offices in New York and Munich served as the source of internal tension in the Station's early years. The Munich Office did not open until 1951, with the Station's directives and broadcasts all stemming from the New York headquarters until then. All station policy originated in US State Department directives regularly sent to key Free Europe Committee and RFE officials. Using these directives, New York-based administrators then issued "daily guidances" on important current events. These guidances were distributed to Polish émigré reporters, who wrote and delivered the radio station's broadcasts.

32. Granville, "Radio Free Europe and International Decision Making During the Hungarian crisis of 1956," 590.

33. Johnson, 17.

Rooted in the State Department policies for each broadcast country, daily guidances told each desk how to best report news for their country-specific audiences. Until 1951, daily guidances were solely authored by Altschul and assistants Lewis Galantiere and William Griffith. Neither Altschul, Galantiere, nor Griffith had background in Eastern Europe.[34] Through the guidance system, the Station's American management dominated the Radio's broadcast policy.

In its early years, Polish émigré reporters exerted significant control over broadcast content. These broadcasts loosely adhered to American directive guidelines. By 1953, however, station leadership worried that émigré broadcasts were diverging too much from American interests. To combat this fear, New York station leadership fostered tension between Polish émigré reporters. In one instance Altschul removed a long-standing Polish émigré from his broadcasting job because "a Pole, far more skillful in propaganda" entered the station. Noting that both Poles were qualified for the job, Altschul added that the Free Europe Committee "ought to provide suitable employment" for the original émigré journalist somewhere in the Station. [35] Altschul's actions demonstrate the overbearing control American station leadership exerted over its Polish reporters. Increasingly dominating station policy, American leadership aimed to create a Polish desk that was malleable to American propaganda interests.

This desire to exert more pressure over the voice of Polish émigrés was explicated in an internal memo in August 1953, when RFE American policy director William Griffith lauded the Polish desk for finally "doing an increasingly more forceful job of implementing the guidance."[36] This note reflects an expectation that Polish reporters would adhere to American broadcasting

34. Puddington, 41-43.

35. At the time of the letter the Free Europe Committee was known as the National Committee for Free Europe (NCFE). Letter from Frank Altschul to Robert Lang, March 11, 1953, Folder 453, Box 162, Frank Altschul Papers.

36. William Griffith, "REUR NYC TWENTY THREE AUGUST FIVE ANALYSIS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF POLISH SPECIAL GUIDANCE BY POLISH DESK FOLLOWS," n.d., Folder 558, Box 170, Frank Altschul Papers.

directives. In this oversight, American station leadership directly contradicted the radio station's mission of providing a platform for Polish émigrés to directly report the news to their home countries.

American supervision also seeped into the review of broadcasts. Consciously afraid that "if the exiles were left to themselves, they would be carried by their feelings and/or wishful thinking," American supervisors in Munich established policies that granted Poles a form of regulated autonomy over their broadcasts.[37] To ensure this oversight, Radio Free Europe's New York administrators assigned an American deputy chief to each language's broadcasting service. Across the station's different language services American deputy chiefs "behaved as though he were chief," overriding émigré leadership and discounting the importance of émigré journalists.[38] Further, after each broadcast, Free Europe Committee policy advisers reviewed radio scripts with Polish émigré writers to discuss the station's message. This process intended to standardize station policy lines while eliminating a threat of "pre-broadcast censorship" by American leadership.[39] While not explicitly censoring broadcasts, American supervisors ensured that American foreign policy goals of "liberation" in East-Central Europe and "non-cooperation with the Soviet-dominated regimes" guided Radio Free Europe programming. Through micro-managing Polish journalists, American administrators demonstrated an implicit competing mission for the station to act as an arm of American foreign policy interests.

To this end, upward of twenty key American stakeholders, including politicians, Crusade financiers, and station administrators, received regular reports gauging audience response to broadcasts. Citing examples of specific broadcasts that spurred "desertions from Poland" and

37. Puddington, 42-43.

38. Susan D. Haas, "Communities of Journalists and Journalism Practice at Radio Free Europe During the Cold War (1950-1995)," PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2013, 147.

39. Puddington, 42-43.

Swedish radio reports attributing "new [Polish refugee] arrivals" to RFE Polish broadcasting, American management relished examples of how their broadcasts encouraged communist defectors.[40] These examples clarify that, in some capacities, the American-dominated reporting model was successful in encouraging anti-communist action. However successful, this model was still rooted in American oversight and undercut the importance of émigrés to Radio Free Europe's mission.

Poles in America and Americans in Europe: The Station's Middle Management

Under the scrutiny of American leadership, RFE's Polish desk remained wedged between American oversight and the Polish émigré community. Located in New York, Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, a prominent member of the Home Army, the wartime Polish underground, directed the Munich-based Polish desk from across the Atlantic with a firm eye toward asserting Polish broadcasting autonomy. This proved to be a challenging task, as American leadership attempted to win Nowak's favor in order to exert more control over broadcasts. Courted by Altschul and RFE managers, Nowak was invited on weekend trips and to corporate dinners, where he would be asked to deliver copies of listener letters to administrators.[41] Aware of the need to integrate Polish listener and émigré sentiments into the Station's programming, Nowak built a Polish desk advisory committee comprised of leading members of Poland's main exiled political parties.[42] Based out of New York, however, Nowak relied on the Polish-dominated Munich office to ensure the station's émigré voice.

Fearful that American oversight could get lost in translation, American administrators staffed American researchers on Munich-based Polish émigré reporting teams as well. To their

40. "Effectiveness of RFE Broadcasts," August 9, 1951, Folder 558, Box 170, Frank Altschul Papers.
41. Jan Nowak to Frank Altschul, November 12, 1952, Folder 557, Box 170, Frank Altschul Papers.
42. Pawel Machcewicz, *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe: 1950-1989*, (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 24-25.

American hometowns, these researchers acted as ambassadors of anti-communism, demonstrating the work that was going on abroad to combat the Soviet threat. In Munich, these American researchers ensured the Polish staff's obedience to RFE policy guidances. One of the ways this was achieved was through daily meetings with the Polish staff, where American research advisers chose the day's programs for each respective country.[43] Though American researchers deferred broadcasting choices to East European natives if there was any disagreement, these daily meetings still allowed American researchers to play a role in the final editorial decisions, a process that was touted as being uniquely by and for Poles.

Hailing from Delano, Minnesota, RFE researcher Paul Henze exemplified the unique position of one of these Munich-based American researchers. With the tagline "Delightful Delano: a friendly place to live and earn," Delano fit the bill of a classic American small town.[44] Boasting town-wide baseball games, bingo, and carnival shows in their local paper, Delano's 1,300 citizens enjoyed a comfortable life on the outskirts of the more bustling Twin Cities. [45] After graduating from Delano High School, Henze attended the small liberal arts St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota where he gained an interest in foreign languages. Doggedly following this interest, Henze added language after language to his repertoire as he completed numerous post-graduate programs across the United States before enrolling at Harvard. A polyglot with a penchant for East European affairs, Henze worked a stint at the CIA and gained proficiency in 11 languages before being appointed as a policy administrator for RFE's Munich Office in 1954.[46]

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43. Anne O'Hare McCormick, "A Focal Point in the Battle of the Airwaves," *The New York Times,* August 22, 1953, Folder 7, Box 1, Paul Henze Papers, the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California.

44. *The Delano Eagle,* July 15, 1954*,* Folder 7, Box 1, Paul Henze Papers.

45. *The Delano Eagle,* July 15, 1954*,* Folder 7, Box 1, Paul Henze Papers; U.S. Census Bureau, "Population of Minnesota, by Counties April 1, 1950," 1950 Census of Population Preliminary Counts, 1950.

46. National Committee for a Free Europe, "Personal History Statement – Application for Employment Paul Henze," Folder 2, Box 1, Paul Henze Papers.

The Delano Eagle reported Henze's success with glee, with one headline about the local legend congratulating townspeople that the "contribution you may have made to 'Crusade for Freedom'" allows for a Delano native to "hold a key post" in a "sincere, steady operation" against the communists.[47] Describing in vivid detail for its small-town Minnesotan readership the daily processes of the station's Munich operations, *The Delano Eagle* demonstrated the fascination with and efficacy of efforts to frame RFE broadcasting within harsh anti-Red strokes. In this effort, Henze, though empathetic to Nowak and émigré causes, provided the American public with an image of an American-led, vehemently anti-communist Radio Free Europe. Representing American interests in Munich, researchers such as Henze operated at the center of the tension between the station's mission and American policy interests. In complying with American propaganda needs, Henze demonstrated the sharp ideological and geopolitical divisions within the station and its Munich Office.

The Polish Voice: Listeners and Defectors Weigh In

One night in the middle of December 1953 two high-ranking members of Poland's Ministry of Security snuck away from a business trip in East Berlin to shop in the Western part of the city. The two officers were separated in a crowd, allowing one of the officers to escape and seek asylum in West Germany.[48] This pattern was not unusual: many defectors used similar tactics to leave Poland. But this defection was unique. This defection was unprecedented because of the defector himself: Jozef Światło, Director of "Department Ten," Poland's secret police. Tasked with monitoring all communists in Poland and protecting the integrity of the Party, Światło was the first prominent Polish Communist to defect and register his experience with Radio Free

47. *The Delano Eagle,* July 15, 1954*,* Folder 7, Box 1, Paul Henze Papers.

48. Flora Lewis, "Policing a Satellite," 1958, Folder 131, Box 11, Jerzy Ptakowski Papers, Fonds No. 11, Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of America, New York, New York.

Europe.[49] Joining forces with RFE's "Voice of Free Poland" program, Światło began broadcasting a series of tell-all episodes on the Station's airwaves.

Having previously arrested Władysław Gomułka for nationalist leanings, Światło represented a hierarchical People's Poland where "the party was ruled by the police and the police were ruled by the Soviet Union."[50] For the station, Światło provided previously unavailable access to the Polish regime. Speaking "almost nightly" for three months starting in September 1954, Światło was the radio station's first high-profile émigré leaker. Reporting Światło was high-stakes, with the station itself admitting that "probably no other regime official knew more than Światło about Communist Party personnel and affairs in Poland."[51] To misconstrue or not fully convey Światło's messages would be an injustice to the station's mission.

Światło's deposition and broadcasts provided a template for future Polish émigré and listener stories. Despite significant American oversight on all aspects of the station's administration, RFE Director Robert Lang devolved authority over Światło's broadcasts to Polish journalists. Émigré reporters gathered and broadcasted Światło's interviews outside of the control of American policy guidances and interventions, with Lang conceding "our Poles were allowed to figure how best to use Światło." [52] Thus, Światło became a central trial run for émigré reporters figuring out how to manage reports from Polish émigrés and listeners on life in Poland.

Removed from the policy directives of the American station leadership, these émigrés and Polish listeners viewed RFE as more than a news source. For Polish listeners, writers, and

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49. "Soviet Campaign to Destroy Poland's Catholic Church Revealed," Folder 558, Box 170, Frank Altschul Papers.

50. Puddington, 35.

51. "Soviet Campaign to Destroy Poland's Catholic Church Revealed," Folder 558, Box 170, Frank Altschul Papers.

52. Letter from Robert Lang to Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the Free Europe Committee, March 1, 1955, Folder 455, Box 162, Frank Altschul Papers.

broadcasters, the station provided a forum for Poles on either side of the Iron Curtain to engage in conversation. Referencing Polish émigré reporters in letters as "Dearest Brothers who Live in Freedom" and "Dearest Countrymen, who live in the Free World," Polish listeners felt a clear sense of affinity with the station's Polish identity.[53] Accepting the risk of government retaliation if their letters were intercepted, these Polish listeners demonstrated a dedication to their émigré counterparts and Radio Free Europe in taking the risk to write in.

Émigré Dominance through the "Information Loop"

It was this mutual understanding between countrymen living in exile and in Poland that would ultimately shape the station's Polish broadcasts. In comprehending Polish concerns from a local, rather than propagandistic, American, perspective, Polish émigré writers were able to transcend the tight hold of American RFE leadership on broadcast policy. This relationship between Polish listeners and émigrés in Western Europe fostered an "information loop," where information on life in Poland both entered and exited the country through Poles at Radio Free Europe.

In the first step of this loop, Polish listeners wrote to the radio station. Addressing a wide variety of issues, these letters ranged from feedback on the station's broadcasts to reports on life in Poland. In August 1953, the Munich office received 147 letters from Poland. These letters were fairly equally distributed in their geographic origin, demonstrating the success of the station's reach in gaining listeners outside of major cities and across all of Poland.[54] Writing to the station was a risky task, with many listeners opting to sign their notes with pseudonyms instead of their real names. To underscore this risk, one listener reminded the station in their

53. "Letters from Poland Received by the Polish Desk of Radio Free Europe in Munich Between: May and October, 1952," Folder 561, Box 171, Frank Altschul Papers.

54. Ibid.

letter that there was ample opportunity to get in trouble for writing as "all foreign letters have to be submitted to the post office clerk."[55]

Despite the risk of writing to the radio station, listeners who wrote across the Iron Curtain noted that they felt writing letters increased their own security and hope for a Polish-led reform of communism. One writer, who identified himself as a workman, asked for Polish émigrés and researchers at Radio Free Europe to "plead for the Polish cause with the Western Allies." Urging that "we know that our and your cause does not entirely depend on you. But you can influence those who take decisions in the West," the workman's letter is emblematic of the sense of hope fostered through listener letters.[56] Placing the onus of responsibility for Polish freedom equally on RFE's émigré reporters and on Western governments, this letter demonstrates the sense of trust between listeners in Poland and Polish émigrés at the radio station.

In addition to listener letters, Polish defectors and émigrés living in the West logged reports with the station. Similar to letters, these reports were important because they provided a way for Poles outside of the radio station to share their opinions and experiences with Radio Free Europe. Many defectors, such as Światło, came in for interviews with the station, where they would share their understanding of current events. Sometimes these defectors could provide vital information on other topics of importance, such as the Polish government's efforts to jam radio broadcasts. This was witnessed in the report of G. Bejner, a former roving technician in Szczecin whose job was to inspect radio centers in Poland to be sure that they were working. Bejner was also in charge of ensuring that Polish government mandates to prevent the reception of RFE

55. Letter from J. Bezet to Radio Free Europe, n.d. Folder 559, Box 171, Frank Altschul Papers.

56. "Letters from Poland Received by the Polish Desk of Radio Free Europe in Munich Between: May and October, 1952," Folder 561, Box 171, Frank Altschul Papers.

broadcasts by "jamming" the airwaves were successful.[57] Bejner provided Radio Free Europe with information on how to better subvert government jamming efforts. More importantly, however, Bejner's interview reflected the level of trust between defectors and the Polish desk. Providing information on how to technologically combat Polish anti-RFE procedures, Bejner trusted his interviewers with major intelligence despite only recently escaping from Poland. In freely giving away access to the secrets of Polish jamming procedures, Bejner demonstrated a deep trust between the station and its listeners.

Sometimes this first step of the information loop failed, as not all Polish listeners identified with the shared community between Polish émigrés at the station and Poles in Poland. Listeners who supported the Polish government would subvert this relationship between listeners and émigré reporters by infiltrating the station. In one instance, an émigré freelancer was caught smuggling information to Polish intelligence services. In another case, when émigré reporter Zbigniew Brydak was discovered acting as a mole for the Polish secret police, he returned to Poland where he participated in "propaganda attacks against RFE and the émigré community as a whole."[58] In his memoir of his time working at the station, Nowak recounted only three instances of Polish spies infiltrating the station prior to the mid-1970s.[59] It is of note that two of these instances were during the early 1950s. The focus of Polish infiltration efforts in the early 1950s attests to the Polish government's desire to undercut the system of trust between Polish émigré reporters and their listeners in Poland. For the Polish government to view this relationship between RFE's Polish audience and writers as a threat signifies the power that the station held over its audience.

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57. Transcript of Interview between G. Bejner and J. Quinn, V. Skee, March 19, 1954, Folder 6, Box 1707, RFE Corporate Records, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Palo Alto, California.

58. Machcewicz, *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe: 1950-1989*, 70-71.

59. Ibid.

In the second step of the information loop, émigré reporters synthesized Polish feedback to incorporate listener input into their broadcasts. Writing seasonal reports analyzing which listeners were writing in and what they were discussing, the Munich office closely followed listener feedback. Categorizing reports by social class, age, and gender, émigré researchers intended to better understand their audience. In comparing the letter writers' background with data on Poland's population, émigré researchers were able to confirm that "as a rule the letters do not express merely opinions of individual writers, but reflect the views of their milieux [sic]."[60] With this categorization, émigré reporters gained a sense of how Poles at large felt about key news issues, rather than isolating each letter as a unique, standalone instance.

In building a stronger relationship with listeners along national lines, Polish émigrés developed programming that drew on common cultural touchpoints. In doing so, émigré reporters built community with listeners outside of the context of political information. One broadcast, called "Polish Tea Party," intended to build this bridge between Polish émigré children and children in Poland through child-friendly programming. In this show, Polish émigré children recorded songs and perform sketches "spiced with anti-Communist satire" to broadcast to Polish youth.[61] Attempting to provide similar fun, cultural programming for adult listeners, émigré reporters also interviewed major Western pop-cultural icons for various broadcasts. In one example, Polish Cultural Editor Jozef Ptaczek interviewed prominent French singer Françoise Hardy and other French starlets for specials intending to provide glimpses of Western pop culture to Polish listeners.[62] These efforts demonstrate how émigré journalists worked to

60. "Letters from Poland Received by the Polish Desk of Radio Free Europe in Munich Between: May and October, 1952," Folder 561, Box 171, Frank Altschul Papers.

61. "The Children Speak," n.d. Folder 455, Box 162, Frank Altschul Papers.

62. Untitled photos, n.d. Folder 1, Box 1, Jozef Ptaczek Papers, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Palo Alto, California.

avoid solely propagandistic news-based broadcasts. In including pop cultural media in their programming, émigré reporters intended to build a station that also met the cultural needs of its listeners.

Figure 3: Left, Polish émigré children recording "Polish Tea Party" at the Radio Free Europe Munich studio. "The Children Speak," Radio Free Europe Files, n.d. Folder 1, Box 1, Jozef Ptaczek Papers, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Palo Alto, California.

Figure 4: Right, Françoise Hardy interviewing with Radio Free Europe. Radio Free Europe Files, n.d. Folder 1, Box 1, Jozef Ptaczek Papers, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Palo Alto, California.

The Polish desk also monitored Polish media, using references to RFE as a gauge of how successful its own programming was. While outside of the direct information loop with listeners, monitoring Polish media was an indirect way for Radio Free Europe to understand its impact on listeners. One example of this was a March 9, 1954 Warsaw Radio roundtable discussion on RFE programming. Discussing a recent meeting of the Big Four in Berlin, Warsaw Radio's broadcast mirrored the outline of a recent RFE broadcast on the same event. In taking time to explicitly

address Radio Free Europe's presentation of the conference, the Warsaw Radio broadcast demonstrated how powerful RFE's reports were.[63] In this manner, monitoring Polish broadcasts allowed the station to gauge how effective their broadcasts were in countering the Polish government's narrative and reaching a large audience.

The 1954 Warsaw Radio broadcast was one of many that RFE researchers monitored to better understand their audience. By July 1955, researchers in the Munich office regularly read over 550 newspapers from behind the Iron Curtain. A press release on the topic noted that RFE researchers monitored communist media so that "broadcasters may be familiar with and reply to regime propaganda."[64] While Polish broadcasts aided the station in monitoring the efficacy of its work, Polish media also provided intelligence on life behind the Iron Curtain. This intelligence could be used to corroborate the stories share by Polish listeners, thus tying in to the information loop.

Closing the Information Loop

In 1956 Ptaczek reminded station administrators and leading members of the Western press that émigrés and "all of us who went through the communist purgatory or are more familiar with communist creed and tactics have a twofold duty in the Free World." Urging that this duty required émigrés to "spare no efforts to bring an end to the slavery" of communism, Ptaczek's call to action brings into focus what motivated émigré reporters.[65] While furthering anti-communist propaganda, these émigré reporters were not at Radio Free Europe to exclusively highlight American voices and policy concerns. Instead, as Ptaczek notes, émigré reporters

63. Whitney Shepherdson, "Radio Free Europe - I. Regime Activities and RFE Programming," April 1954, Folder 454, Box 162, Frank Altschul Papers.

64. Alton Kastner, "For Release in Sunday's AM July 3" Folder 455, Box 162, Frank Altschul Papers.

65. Letter from Jozef Ptaczek to The Daily Telegraph, April 26, 1956, Folder 1, Box 1, Jozef Ptaczek Papers.

viewed their service at Radio Free Europe as a duty to their country— Poland. Seeking to provide a space for Polish thought and culture to grow, across the Iron Curtain, émigré reporters worked at the station as Poles first, reporters second.

Encouraging open dialogue among Polish listeners, émigré reporters, and defectors to the West, Polish émigré journalists created a space for intelligence and political commentary to flow freely between Poland and Radio Free Europe. This information loop provided Polish listeners a venue to express their concerns with life in Poland to those with external power. In addition, this information loop offered Poles at the station an opportunity to gain ground-level insight into life in communist Poland. This knowledge allowed émigré reporters to better understand their audience, as reporters parlayed listener feedback into new programming. This system of communication would ultimately serve as the backbone of the station's reporting structure leading into 1956.

CHAPTER TWO:
ALIGNING AMERICAN ADMINISTRATORS AND POLISH OPINION:
STATION POLICY IN THE WAKE OF THE 1956 POZNAŃ RIOTS

Figure 5: A Fourth of July cartoon printed in the days following the Poznań Riots comparing the revolutionary spirit between the American Revolution and that of the early stages of the 1956 thaw. Cartoon, *The San Diego Union*, July 4, 1956, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36, Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of the Americas Archives, New York, New York.

On February 25, 1956 First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party Nikita Khrushchev gave a speech at the Twentieth CPSU Party Congress that caused upheaval throughout the Soviet bloc. Barring international visitors from attending the speech, the audience was limited to exclusively Soviet delegates. Later labeled the "Secret Speech," Khrushchev attacked the Stalinist regime

with "unprecedented passion."[66] This speech, occurring alongside shifts in the Polish United Worker's Party (PZPR) and in the internal political atmosphere in Poland, served as the gateway to a political thaw and communist reform that would consume Poland over the course of 1956.

Through the Polish desk's émigré-dominated reporting process, and a strong central relationship with both Polish émigré and Polish communities, Radio Free Europe became a central hub for reformist conversations. This reformist approach to anti-communism was often rooted in pragmatism. It was through integrating these Polish and émigré sentiments into station policy that American administrators eventually understood the Poznań protesters' desire for communist reform during anti-government protests in Poland in 1956.

The Seeds of Liberalization

Marking a clear turning point away from the tight-fisted, terror-ridden Stalinist era, the Secret Speech critiqued Stalin's dictatorial rule, poor leadership in World War II, and criminal mass deportations of entire nations. Pausing at the end, Khrushchev asked his listeners to refrain from sharing the contents of the speech. Afraid that the speech would signal weakness to the West if it was leaked, Khrushchev urged his audience to "not give ammunition to the enemy … not wash our dirty linen before their eyes."[67]

Khrushchev did not get his wish. The Polish Communist Party leaked the speech to the West and it was published in the Western press by March.[68] On March 24, 1956 Radio Free Europe issued a report on the Twentieth Party Congress, seeking a station policy that would facilitate the "de-canonization of St. Stalin."[69] Noting that the speech was supremely "rich in

66. Paweł Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956*, 16-17.

67. Nikita Khrushchev, "The Secret Speech - On the Cult of Personality, 1956" (speech, February 25, 1956), Fordham Modern History Sourcebook, https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1956khrushchev-secret1.html

68. John Rettie, "How Khrushchev Leaked His Secret Speech to the World," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 62 (Autumn 2006), 189.

69. "XXTH CONGRESS CPSU," March 24, 1956, Folder 12, Box 39, Imre Kovacs Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Columbia University, New York, NY.

substance," the station memo lauded Khrushchev for providing a "favorable" venue for the station "to engage the enemy on his own ground, search out his vulnerable places, and strike through them at the foundations of his being."[70] Acknowledging the difficulty of blotting Stalin from public memory, the station's memos focused on finding ways to amplify the impact of Khrushchev's speech. By June, the station regularly broadcasted the full text of the speech in each of its listeners' constituent languages.[71]

In Poland, the Secret Speech coincided with another blow to Stalinist-style communism with the death of PZPR Secretary-General Bolesław Bierut on March 12, 1956. Bierut, a hardline communist, was heavily associated with the "hasty Sovietization of all spheres of life and strict subservience to Moscow, the collectivization of agriculture, [and] widespread terror."[72] With greater freedom after Bierut's death, the Central Committee of the PZPR broadly distributed copies of the Secret Speech. The PZPR's decision was unique as no other party in the communist bloc shared the speech outside of their upper-level leadership.[73] Allowing local party cells to host readings of Khrushchev's speech across Poland, the PZPR ensured that Khrushchev's speech reached a wide audience beyond the party members who attended the party cell meetings. In this, the Secret Speech, in conjunction with Bierut's death, became the symbolic turning point for Poland's destalinization and 1956 thaw.

In the wake of Bierut's death and the Secret Speech, Poland witnessed a series of liberalizing reforms throughout Spring 1956. In response to complaints of low wages and living standards, the regime introduced an increase in the minimum wage and pensions. Committing to "raising the living standards of the working masses in Poland," the Polish government added a

70. "XXTH CONGRESS CPSU," Imre Kovacs Papers.
71. Johnson, 79.
72. Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956*, 20-21.
73. Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956*, 20-21.

total of five billion złoty to the wage fund.[74] This liberalization extended to the Catholic Church, where the government lifted restrictions and offered to release Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in April 1956. Wyszyński, arrested in 1953, acted as a "martyr" of Polish Catholic, anti-Stalinist ideology. While Wyszyński determined that he would not return until all of his fellow bishops were restored to their dioceses, the offer for his release demonstrated the impact and reach of the Spring 1956 thaw.[75]

Outside of religious and policy changes, the 1956 Spring thaw included liberalizing changes in the media as the press earned the right to criticize the government.[76] These increased freedoms improved public interest in Polish media, with sociocultural magazines like *Po prostu* and *Nowa Kultura* publishing articles that a group of Wrocław students noted were "simply being snatched up" and read "with interest."[77] This welcoming of public opinion did not end with the state-sponsored media. Extending to the realm of public speech, hundreds of Kraków students organized a march chanting "we want the constitution to be changed."[78] The students were not penalized, reflecting the broader trend toward increased civil liberties and speech freedoms.

Radio Free Europe closely watched these developments in Poland. Continuing to monitor the Polish media, the station's Polish desk maintained copies of all relevant internal broadcasts and publications related to the thaw. With an increased volume of state broadcasts to draw on, station researchers had more information from which they could deduce the future of Poland's

74. "Dietrich's budget report in *Trybuna Ludu*, April 25, 1956," as quoted in "FEP OPERATIONS: POLISH PLAN," May 15, 1956, Plans and Analysis Divisions Folder, Box 44, Imre Kovacs Papers.

75. Tony Kemp-Welch, "Dethroning Stalin: Poland 1956 and Its Legacy," *Europe-Asia Studies* 58, no. 8, (2006): 1261-284.

76. "FEP OPERATIONS: POLISH PLAN," May 15, 1956, Plans and Analysis Divisions Folder, Box 44, Imre Kovacs Papers.

77. Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956*, 61.

78. Ibid., 63.

thaw. Compiling relevant Polish news excerpts into reports analyzing major political trends, station researchers accurately predicted that the "trend toward greater sovereignty and national independence can be expected to grow."[79] The station doubted, however, that the initial thaw would be enough to satiate the Polish public's desire for reform. While acknowledging the PZPR's efforts at liberalization, station researchers hypothesized that "the people desire a much greater degree of relaxation than the state is willing."[80] Using the expressed interests of the Polish people to gauge the course of the Spring thaw, the Polish desk continued with its "Poles first, reporters second" reporting model established in the first half of the 1950s.

Feedback from prominent members of the émigré community also proved essential to the station's early policy toward the 1956 thaw. In March 1956 Stanisław Mikołajczyk, President of the wartime Polish government-in-exile, wrote to the Free Europe Committee urging Polish émigré communities across Europe to cooperate with Poles in Poland to "work jointly … for the formation of popular fronts."[81] Noting that the thaw would be short-lived without further "anti-communist activity," crafted by and for the Polish people, Mikołajczyk forecast a unified front between Polish émigrés and activists Poland in order to achieve further reforms. Though Mikołajczyk publically described himself as "anti-American," he shared the United States' hardline approach to anti-communism.[82] In this, Mikołajczyk viewed American financial and political resources as essential to securing an anti-Stalinist future for Poland. Simultaneously advocating that émigrés remain at the center of anti-Stalinist programming, Mikołajczyk negotiated the space between American hardline anti-communism and Polish reformism. By the

79. "FEP OPERATIONS: POLISH PLAN," May 15, 1956, Plans and Analysis Divisions Folder, Box 44, Imre Kovacs Papers.

80. "FEP OPERATIONS: POLISH PLAN," Imre Kovacs Papers.

81. Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, "The Need for the Intensification of Anti-Communist Activity in Europe," March 15, 1956, Folder 5, Box 68, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk Papers.

82. Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, Letter to the Editor, *The New York Times*, July 5, 1956.

time that a popular desire for increased freedoms and a higher standard of living manifested itself in Poznań in late June, the station was well poised to fill Mikołajczyk's requests.

The Poznań Riots

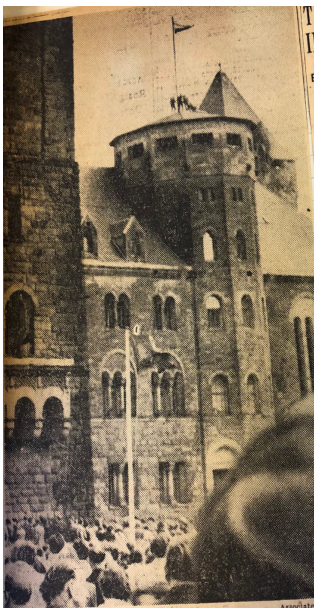

Figure 6: Left: Protesters raise the old Polish flag, banned by the Communist Government, at the city hall in Poznań during the June riots. Photo, *The New York Times*, July 7, 1956, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36, Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of the Americas Archives, New York, New York.

Figure 7: Right: A crowd of rioters surround a piece of Western jamming equipment thrown from the roof of the Poznań Social Insurance Institution. Photo, June 29, 1956, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36, Polish Institute of National Remembrance, n.d.

A shrill bell pierced the early morning Poznań air on June 28, 1956. Having agreed upon the Stalin Locomotive Plant's 6:30 AM siren as the signal to start their protest, workers made their way to the city center in droves. The trams were not running, with one striker leaving a note attached to the first tram scheduled to depart proclaiming "Tram drivers' general strike. We are not driving today."[83] An anonymous strike committee claimed responsibility for the coordinated effort, with somewhere between 70 percent to 80 percent of the city's workers protesting.

83. Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956*, 98.

Chanting "we want to live like human beings," pleas for bread and freedom rang out across the crowd.[84] The protesters attacked the jail and released prisoners, hijacked the government's radio-jamming headquarters, and took arms outside of the security police's headquarters. The rioting did not end until the government's infantry and tanks entered the city, killing somewhere between 400 and 600 of the 30,000 workers who participated in the protest.[85]

While coordinated by working-class Poles, the protests integrated disgruntled members from all strata of Poznań society. Official statistics from the Committee for Public Security noted that 79 percent of those arrested in the protest were workers, while 15 percent of those arrested were students. Though many were anti-communists, the protesters also included many PZPR members, with somewhere between 40 percent and 50 percent of party members employed in Poznań factories joining the strike.[86]

Protesters comprised a wide-ranging swath of the population, mirroring the wide range of Polish Radio Free Europe listeners. It is important to consider that, just as with the Poznań riots, Radio Free Europe enjoyed support from both party and non-party members. In letters to the station many listeners identified themselves as party members, demonstrating that there was an existing cohort of PZPR members protesting the government prior to Poznań.[87] This was corroborated by a Polish soldier who defected and testified with Radio Free Europe that "the Communists, themselves, listen to the Western Stations."[88] Demonstrating the station's centrality to daily life in Poland, this soldier noted that even though only about 10 percent of the population owned radios, news from RFE spread so fast that "whenever I mentioned some news item to my

84. Ibid, 99-100.

85. "The Poznań Riots: A Brief Chronology of Events," Folder 6, Box 17, Arch Puddington Collection, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Palo Alto, California.

86. Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956,* 118-119.

87. Letter from "Piorun" to Radio Free Europe, undated, Folder 559, Box 171, Frank Altschul Papers.

88. "Report on an Interview with Polish Defector, January 1954," Folder 62, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36.

friends, they knew about it. The same was true of my parents, although they have no radios in the village."[89] These listener and defector testimonies serve as reminders of the centrality of Radio Free Europe to life in Poland. Including both average workers and PZPR members of all ages, the station's listeners reflected the diverse population participating in the Poznań protest.

Chief among the protesters' goals was attacking the government's radio jamming equipment. This equipment was used to block RFE and other Western broadcasts from entering Polish airwaves. In destroying the equipment, protesters signaled their support for Western radio by increasing the range for RFE broadcasts. In describing the protest, station reporters noted broken jammers in the middle of the road, "shattered to smithereens [sic] and being trodden underfoot by the crowds."[90] These reporters added that some of the "most powerful" jamming equipment used to block "anti-regime broadcasts from Radio Free Europe" was being "hurled out of the windows of the radio station."[91] Disenchanted protesters viewed radio jamming as an unnecessary waste of government resources. Feeling as though the money spent on radio jamming detracted from that available for food, one protester pointed at a destroyed jammer before commenting "four million złoty it cost, and I get no bread."[92] Whether out of support for Radio Free Europe, or just in an act of opposition to the government, the Poznań protesters increased the station's broadcast range by destroying the jammers.

89. "Report on an Interview with Polish Defector, January 1954," Folder 62, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36.

90. Teletype message from Walter Wagner to Egan, Walker, Galantiere, and Dunning, June 30, 1956, Folder 10, Box 17, Arch Puddington Collection.

91. Ibid.

92. "The Poznań Events: Information Bulletin," September 1956, Folder 46, Box 2, Register of the Free Europe Press Issuances, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Palo Alto, California.

American Administrator's Initial Reaction to Poznań

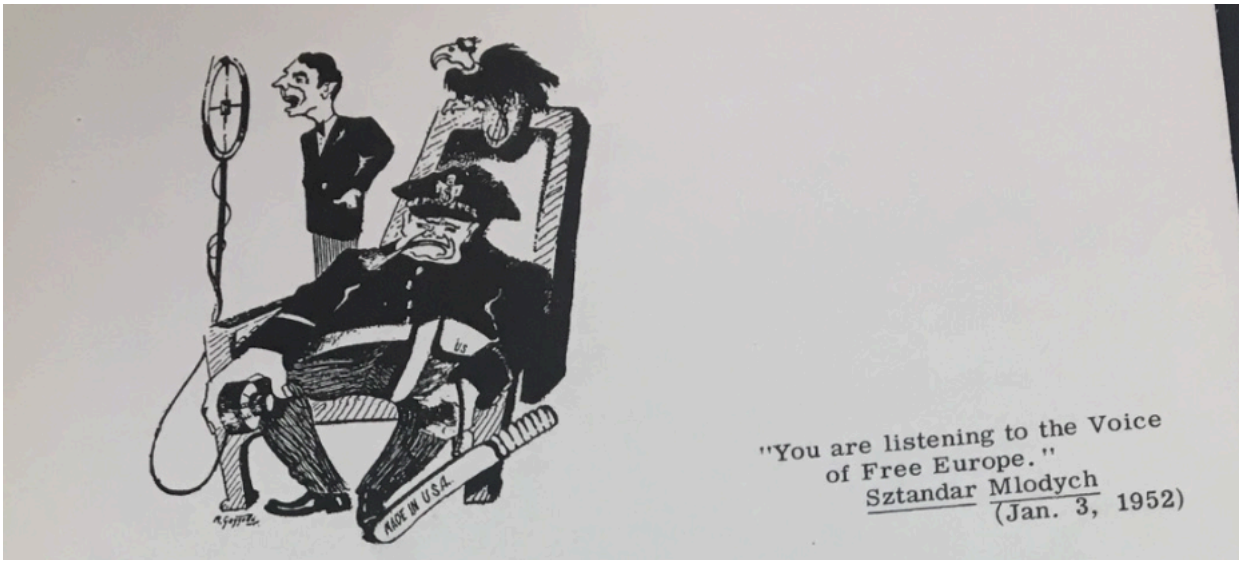

Figure 8: Polish cartoon parodying the role of the American government in dominating Radio Free Europe broadcasts. Photo, "The Black Book: Communist Attacks on the National Committee for a Free Europe, Radio Free Europe, and American and Exile Personnel," Folder 1, Box 72, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk Collection, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Palo Alto, California

The United States and Radio Free Europe's American leadership were initially indecisive on how to react to the Poznań protests. First opting to over-emphasize the protests' revolutionary potential, American administrators initially intended to use the protests as a mechanism for rapidly securing a democratic Poland. It was only in listening to the station's Polish reporters that administrators were eventually persuaded to take a more gradualist approach to Polish politics in the station's broadcasting. This gradualist approach would align with the reformist policies supported by the Poznań protesters.[93]

Upon first hearing about the protests, American administrators did not know how to react. Until this point, Radio Free Europe largely operated as a venue for passive resistance to the regime. In the face of Poznań, American administrators did not have a cohesive vision for what

93. Puddington, 93.

the station's role would be during times of active resistance. The upper echelon of the station's leadership asked newly appointed Station Director W.J. Conovery Egan, questioning "when do we cease to be a home service, a purveyor of political pep talks, etc. and become a revolutionary instrument?"[94] Egan and other administrators wavered between supporting the protests and encouraging the riots, or passively sitting back and allowing the protests to unfold. In this uncertainty, the station's administration developed their response to the anti-communist action in real-time as the Poznań riots unfolded.

American administrators' initial confusion with how to manage Poznań can be explained by their distanced relationship with the Polish people. Throughout Spring 1956 American administrators focused their efforts on larger trends in Eastern Europe, concentrating station bandwidth on disseminating the Secret Speech.[95] Operating at a birds-eye view throughout the 1950s, American administrators were out of touch with Polish public sentiment. To this end, American leadership failed to acknowledge at least four workers strikes that occurred in Poland prior to those in Poznań. [96] The station did not publicly address nor endorse these strikes until the riots in Poznań, which were too significant to ignore.[97] Admitting that they were "not aware" of these other strikes until Poznań, American administrators proved blindsided by the scope of public discontent demonstrated in the Poznań riots.[98] It was Poznań that forced the station to pay attention to Polish public opinion at the ground level. In response to Poznań, American leadership released a bulletin outlining both low- and high-profile anti-communist protests from

94. Letter from Stuart L. Hannon to W.J. Conovery Egan, June 30, 1956, Folder 10, Box 17, Arch Puddington Collection.

95. Puddington, 92-93.

96. Teletype from Walter Wagner to Egan, Walker, Galantiere, and Dunning, July 3, 1956, Folder 2, Box 18, Arch Puddington Collection.

97. "Bulletin #1135, Soviet Bloc Uprisings," June 29, 1956, Folder 14, Box 39, Imre Kovacs Papers.

98. Teletype from Walter Wagner to Egan, Walker, Galantiere, and Dunning, July 3, 1956, Folder 2, Box 18, Arch Puddington Collection.

Siberia to East Germany from the previous three years.[99] With this bulletin, station leadership demonstrated a renewed interest in local strikes and Polish public opinion. This shift demonstrated the previous distance between station administrators and Polish reporters, who themselves had been aware of earlier strikes but were not previously able to draw the administrators' attention to them.

Despite an initial lack of clarity on the station's role during protests, American leadership used Poznań as an opportunity to push for a "free Poland." Viewing the destruction of jamming equipment as a validation of Radio Free Europe, American leadership vowed to "exploit the dynamic Polish justification of RFE's existence."[100] In his first plan for the station's response to Poznań, RFE Deputy Program Director Stuart L. Hannon urged the station to "endorse the strike" and "do everything in the scope of our imagination" to support the protests.[101] Ranging from requests for Poland to accept American food provisions, to urging the Polish government to grant guarantees against brutality and hunger, Hannon and the station's leadership aimed to place the station at the center of the quest for Polish liberation.[102] The State Department echoed the station's request, and on June 29 it determined to restore "political freedom" in Poland.[103] This statement reinforced Hannon's propagandistic approach toward the riots, using Poznań as the starting point for a broader campaign for democracy in Poland. It is only in considering the American administration's initial ignorance of Polish public opinion and previous protests in Poland that the station's original ad-hoc approach to promoting liberation can be considered. Only by listening to Polish émigré reporters did these station administrators truly begin to

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99. "Bulletin #1135, Soviet Bloc Uprisings," June 29, 1956, Folder 14, Box 39, Imre Kovacs Papers.

100. Letter from Stuart L. Hannon to W.J. Conovery Egan, June 30, 1956, Folder 10, Box 17, Arch Puddington Collection.

101. Ibid.

102. Ibid.

103. Elie Abel, "U.S. Urges Soviet Free Satellites," *The New York Times*, June 30, 1956, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36.

understand Polish public opinion, and thereby develop a stronger broadcasting policy following Poznań.

The Munich Desk and Émigré Responses

Witnessing the American administration's liberation rhetoric, the Polish émigré community critiqued the administration's desire to use Poznań for propaganda purposes. The émigré community, including Poles at Radio Free Europe, hoped for the Poznań riots to secure reforms of communism. Joseph Sulkowski, a Poznań native and professor at Catholic University, wrote an op-ed to the *New York Times* criticizing the American government's response to the Poznań riots. Commenting that Washington aimed to "play up the significance of the Poznań riots and to use them as an argument in the cold war against the Soviet Union," Sulkowski followed that the State Department erroneously connected "the Poznań riots with the broader issue of liberating Poland and other countries from Soviet control."[104]

Many Poles, both in and outside of Poland, viewed the events in Poznań as a revolt against Soviet-style communism, not as a complete rejection of Poland's communist regime. One defector noted to the station that, while upset about the economic status of life in Poland, "Poles don't want to fight Poles, even if they hate the Communists. Maybe it would be different if the Russians actually occupied our country. But physically, they do not."[105] This statement aligned with the language of the protesters, who used mostly anti-Soviet language, instead of anti-communist or anti-Polish wording.[106] This is significant, as it demonstrates that, while the Poznań protesters pushed for reform, neither Poles inside Poland nor those who had emigrated

104. Joseph Sulkowski, Letter to the Editor, *The New York Times*, June 30, 1956, Folder 36, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36.

105. "Report on an Interview with Polish Defector, January 1954," Folder 62, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36.

106. Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956,* 127.

viewed the revolts as anti-communist. Instead, to these Poles, the revolts aimed to secure reforms within Polish communism and provided an opportunity to distance themselves from the Soviet Union. For these Poles, the riots were not the full "anti-communist" push for "political freedom" that the United States hoped for.[107]

Surprised by the Poznań riots, the émigré Poles at Radio Free Europe argued for a policy of gradualism when reporting the Poznań riots. This response aligned with that of the émigré community more broadly, with both Polish émigré reporters and other émigré Poles in the West advocating for communist reforms without an overhaul of communism itself. Polish journalists at Radio Free Europe remained wary of the potential for a violent armed conflict, a fact that surprised American administrators. Administrators questioned why "our Poles asked themselves whether the thaw had not already gone too far; but, when after a few days, it became clear that the regime was yielding to demands of the people, confidence returned."[108]

It required the testimony of former President Mikolajczyk to explain Polish émigré hesitancy toward hardline anticommunism to the Americans. While Mikolajczyk explicitly opposed communism in Poland, he represented the more pragmatic voice of Polish émigrés at-large to the House Committee on Un-American Activities.[109] Testifying that the Polish people "know, however, that they have the Russians to the east, inside Poland, and in the west," Mikolajczyk asserted that Polish émigrés and Poles in Poland were afraid of being invaded by

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107. Elie Abel, "U.S. Urges Soviet Free Satellites," *The New York Times*, June 30, 1956, Folder 36, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36.

108. William Griffith "Memorandum: Policy Review of the Voice of Free Poland Programming," December 5, 1957, Paul Henze Papers.

109. Founded in 1938 and disbanded in 1976, the House Committee on Un-American Activities was a Cold War-era congressional committee in the United States that aimed to investigate the "character, and objects of un-American activities" and examine "un-American propaganda that is instigated from foreign countries." For more information on the committee's work, see Charles E. Schamel, "RECORDS OF THE HOUSE UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE, 1945-1969," July 1995, Preliminary Inventories for Special, Select, and Joint Committees, National Archives of the United States, Washington, DC.

the Soviet Union if the revolts gained more traction.[110] Due to their distance from Polish public opinion, American administrators could not grasp the full extent of the Polish community's fear of invasion. It was only through listening to émigré reporters that station administrators realized the extent of Polish opposition toward using the protests as a platform for full liberation.

As outsiders at the station, émigré sources were often unaware of the divisions between émigré journalists and American administrators. In testimonies with the station, these émigré sources shared candidly that they were wary of Soviet intervention. Prior to the events in Poznań, one defector noted that there were limits to Radio Free Europe's ability to promote democracy in Poland. Warning the station of these limits, this defector noted "I don't think that RFE can make us risk our lives."[111] While not in Poland, and therefore not facing a direct threat to his life, this defector's comment points at a broader issue of Polish national consciousness. In many ways, these Polish émigrés shared a "community of fate" with Poles in Poland. While in some cases this included family and friends still in Poland, this shared fate also expanded to include a common national identity.[112] Sharing the experiences of invasion and devastation during World War II, this "community of fate" cannot be ignored as a potential motivating factor behind the fear of conflict escalating.

It is within this "community of fate" that Polish Desk Editor Jan Nowak lobbied on behalf of Polish interests during the Poznań riots. Declaring "Poles are the best experts on Poland," Nowak urged American administrators to reconsider their position on Polish émigré

110. House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities, "Testimony of Stanislaw Mikolajczyk," November 17, 1956, Folder 2, Box 77, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk Papers.

111. "Report on an Interview with Polish Defector, January 1954," Folder 62, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36.

112. "Report on an Interview with Polish Defector, January 1954," Folder 62, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36.

input.[113] While granting that the goal of "full freedom and full democracy" was noble and valid, Nowak maintained that this goal could only be achieved through "less propagandistic" messaging that prioritized the "team of exiles (…) studying daily all events and changes in their country."[114] The Polish "community of fate" was the natural antithesis to the American propagandistic approach to liberation from communism. Rooted in Polish identity and shared experience, it was this community that allowed émigré journalists and sources to better understand the potential repercussions that could come from the Poznań riots.

An Attentive Administration: Shift in Station Policy

Paying closer attention to Polish public sentiment and émigré recommendations, the station's administration eventually granted émigré reporters and the Munich desk more leeway in reporting the thaw. With Nowak, Mikolajczyk, and defector testimonies reiterating the importance of gradualist messaging, American administrators soon realized that the most promising path was one of promoting "liberalization rather than liberation."[115] Shifting from top-down guidance to deferring to the input of émigré reporters, the American administration "offered tremendous leverage to those engaged in broadcasting to Poland."[116] Acknowledging the success of this Poles-first broadcasting method, one American administrator noted that the tone of scripts "was that of one who knew and understood his audience because he himself felt a sense of complete identification with them. These were Poles broadcasting to Poles: one cannot read these scripts without feeling that speaker and listener were in accord."[117] Trusting Polish

113. Letter from Jan Nowak to Program Director William Rafael, August 11, 1956, Folder 456, Box 162, Frank Altschul Papers.

114. Letter from Jan Nowak to Program Director William Rafael, August 11, 1956, Folder 456, Box 162, Frank Altschul Papers.

115. Puddington, 93.

116. William Griffith "Memorandum: Policy Review of the Voice of Free Poland Programming," December 5, 1957, Paul Henze Papers.

117. William Griffith "Memorandum: Policy Review of the Voice of Free Poland Programming," December 5, 1957, Paul Henze Papers.

émigrés that the best path to a free Poland was through gradual reform, the Station steered away from programming that could promote further bloodshed.[118]

American and émigré researchers partnered to produce a number of internal reports on the Poznań riots to inform broadcasts. These memos heavily featured anecdotes from Poles and excerpts from Polish media broadcasts. The main report on the protests, published almost a full month after the strike, accurately reflects Poles' dissatisfaction with Soviet-style communism, low wages, and poor living conditions in Poland. Signaling the Station's deference to Polish sentiments, the report included quotations from the protesters themselves. Concluding that Poland could make a "model, independent 'socialist' state," this statement reflected the station's shift away from the State Department's initial desire to use the protests to liberate Poland. [119] In acknowledging the potential for reformed communism in Poland, the report demonstrated the station's newfound prioritization of Polish voices.

These Polish émigré-dominated scripts enjoyed success with listeners, serving as the basis for a more cohesive Polish-first policy at the station. Station administration increasingly took note of how well émigré reporters understood Polish public opinion. With this, American administrators lauded the positive "effect of Poles here of [sic] American policy guidances."[120] Seeking out more Polish sources, the station's director and deputy director urged lower-level American administrators to yield to Polish needs. Strongly recommending that reporters place "dramatic emphasis on Polish peoples [sic] demand for food," these directives reflect how even

118. Johnson, 83.

119. Free Europe Press Plans and Analysis Division "Poznań, The Background" July 24, 1956

120. William Griffith "Memorandum: Policy Review of the Voice of Free Poland Programming," December 5, 1957, Paul Henze Papers.

upper-level administrators paid attention to Polish wishes as they coordinated broadcast policy.[121]

When recapping the events in Poznań at the NATO Defense College, Munich-based American researcher Paul Henze attributed the success of the events in Poland to Polish nationalism. Acknowledging the Polish desire for communist reform and general distrust of the Soviet system, Henze noted that the "metamorphosis" in Poland was rooted in a "contagious" Polish nationalism. Henze furthered that through this nationalism, "communism in Poland has become more Polish than communist." [122] Henze's use of the Poles' nationalist reformist framework to discuss Poznań demonstrates the degree to which Polish philosophy permeated the station's understanding of the June riots.

Hitting at a central discussion emerging within Polish anti-Soviet dissident circles at the time, Henze acknowledges a Polish desire to pursue, what one Pole described as, its "own Polish road."[123] While this "Polish road" may not be a nationalist communist regime in the style of Yugoslavia, the Poznań riots reiterated the extent of Polish support for destalinization. In viewing these developments, American administrators at Radio Free Europe eventually ceded authority to Jan Nowak and Polish journalists. Opting for a policy of gradualism that provided an "opportunity to expand Poland's margin of freedom," Radio Free Europe successfully inserted itself into the center of conversations on communist reform in Poland.[124]

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121. Telegram from W.J. Conovery Egan and Stuart L. Hannon to Rafael, Bell, Bernard, July 2, 1956, Folder 2, Box 18, Arch Puddington Collection.

122. Paul Henze, "Recent Developments in Eastern Europe," December 14, 1956, Folder 5, Box 27, Paul Henze Papers.

123. Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956,* 83.

124. Puddington, 95.

CHAPTER THREE
"FREEDOM OF THE POLES":
SOLIDIFYING THE IMPACT OF POLISH VOICES DURING THE POLISH OCTOBER

Figure 9: *New York Times* cartoon heralding Gomułka's defeat of Stalinism. Cartoon, *The New York Times*, December 1956, Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of the Americas Archives, New York, New York.

"The Third Possibility"

The trials for those arrested during the Poznań riots did not begin until late September 1956. Ushering in Poland's revolutionary October, the Poznań trials introduced a series of questions surrounding the efficacy of rioting and how to determine the best route for reforming Polish communism. In the midst of these questions, Radio Free Europe entered October 1956 grappling with its mission and identity. Though the station's mission emphasized using radio to challenge

the "Soviet empire" and contribute to the "liberation" of Eastern Europe, events in Poland escalated faster than the station anticipated.[125] Lacking a clear understanding of what its role would be in the face of a successful and potentially violent anti-Soviet movement, like the October thaw, the station was forced to develop this plan quickly.

Through applying the Poles-first broadcasting method that it developed over the course of the early 1950s and during the Poznań riots, the station incorporated Polish émigré and public opinion into its strategy toward the October thaw. The station ultimately deferred to Polish Desk Editor Jan Nowak's middle-ground "third possibility" strategy. Wary of encouraging internal conflict in Poland and further violent resistance against the PZPR regime, Nowak sought a middle ground between remaining silent in the face of the pro-liberalization movement and encouraging a violent revolution. Nowak urged the station's American policy coordinators to establish a middle-line broadcast policy as early as October 1955, noting "the further success of our mission will therefore depend on our ability to prove to our listeners that there exists a third possibility: the regaining of true freedom and the attainment of a genuine peace without resorting to war."[126] It was not until internalizing the importance of Polish input, and desire for largely non-violent reform, over the course of 1956 that American leadership truly began to understand Nowak's suggestion.

Even before the October events, in September 1956 American policy advisor William E. Griffith argued that the station's task was "assist[ing] and prolonging and extending the thaw."[127] In adopting an anti-Soviet military intervention, pro-revolution stance, the station operated in

125. Granville, "Radio Free Europe and International Decision-Making During the Hungarian Crisis of 1956," 590.

126. Jan Nowak to Lewis Galantiere, October 3, 1955 Letter, Folder 10, Box 16, Arch Puddington Collection.

127. Johnson, 80.

tandem with the pace of public opinion and political change in Poland. Drawing on a system of trust between Polish listeners and émigrés developed over the course of the 1950s, the station operated as a forum for conversation throughout the 1956 thaw. Urging the public to remain calm, while still supporting Gomułka's rise to power, the station's broadcasts effectively toed the line of endorsing communist reform without inviting violence. This "third possibility" policy allowed Radio Free Europe to uplift émigré and Polish listener voices, and thereby further facilitate a peaceful revolution in Poland.

Gomułka's Thaw

This "third possibility" was not a foregone conclusion. It was not until early August 1956 that a revolution appeared possible at all. On August 4, 1956, the Central Committee restored notable Polish communist Władysław Gomułka's party membership. With this, the public began to whisper about more lasting political change. Accused of a "rightist-nationalist" deviation from the PZPR, Gomułka was arrested and imprisoned in 1948. Supporting a reformed communism that rejected collectivized farms, accepted the prominence of Catholicism, and advocating for Polish sovereignty from the Soviet Union in developing domestic policy, Gomułka argued for a "Polish road to socialism."[128]

Poles viewed Gomułka's rehabilitation as a sign of the party leadership's support for Poznań and opposition to Stalinist communism. In the weeks following Gomułka's official return, 12,000 members applied to leave their cooperatives while private farmers stopped delivering compulsory grain and milk deliveries. This response to Gomułka's return manifested itself in other spheres, with anti-Russian graffiti appearing across Poznań and students

128. Andrzej Werblan, "Wladyslaw Gomulka and the Dilemma of Polish Communism," *International Political Science Review*, 9, no. 2 (1988), 143.

coordinating public rallies in Warsaw.[129] Taking action in any way possible, the public demonstrated its opposition to the Stalinist system and support for Gomułka's return.

These anti-Soviet sentiments continued to swell leading into the Politburo sessions preceding the Eighth Plenum of the PZPR Central Committee. While not formally a member of the Politburo, Gomułka was welcomed at these mid-October meetings. Acknowledging the rising anti-Soviet tide, First Secretary of the PZPR Edward Ochab urged the Politburo that the "increase in anti-Soviet sentiments … is a matter of life and death."[130] On October 19 the Eighth Plenum cemented this anti-Soviet thaw. At the meeting, Gomułka was installed as a member of the Central Committee and then elected to serve as the Party's First Secretary. This restructuring of the Central Committee also excluded Stalinists from positions of power. Simultaneous to these events, however, an uninvited delegation of leading Soviet politicians and Warsaw Pact generals arrived in Warsaw. The news of the Soviet delegation's arrival was revealed in the middle of the Central Committee meeting, proving that the Soviet intervention was more immediate than ever before. Rerouting the events on the calendar, the Plenum stalled as Gomułka and Ochab went to meet with the Soviets.

In meetings that afternoon, Ochab and Gomułka squared up against Khrushchev. The Soviets threatened Poland with their military prowess, announcing that a Soviet division in southern Poland was preparing for battle. Meanwhile, in the East, the distinguished Polish-Soviet World War II veteran Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky was moving troops closer to Warsaw.[131] In a rage of fury against Gomułka and Polish anti-Soviets, Khrushchev exploded, "I will show you what the way to Socialism looks like. If you don't obey we will crush you. We are going to

129. Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956*, 158-161.
130. Ibid, 165.
131. Robert T Holt, Radio Free Europe, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), 181.

use force to kill all sorts of risings in this country … We will never permit this country to be sold to the American imperialists."[132] Connecting Gomułka's rise to the United States, Khrushchev attributed the 1956 thaw to an East-West dichotomy, rather than to internal Polish politics and resistance to Stalinism. Khrushchev's threats acknowledged a fear of Poland's relationship with the West, suggesting that the only way the Soviets could keep Poland within its sphere of influence was through military intervention. While Gomułka successfully convinced Khrushchev that his election did not constitute a shift away from socialism, the fear of American influence continued to loom in the wake of the Soviet delegation's visit.

Station Policy Adjusts: "Damned If We Do, Damned If We Don't"

In response to the news of Gomułka and the Soviet delegation's arrival, the station entered a state of panic. Gomułka's election forced the question as to whether the station was hardline anti-communist and sought to install a democratic regime in Poland, or, whether the station merely amplified Polish voices as a news network advocating for socialist anti-Soviet reforms. One American station researcher, for example, urged further revolution in Poland, opposing Gomułka. In contemplating the role of Poles, the researcher questioned if American "propagandists" at Radio Free Europe contradicted the "principle we claim to follow," of inciting a full-scale anti-communist revolution. The researcher distinguished that, if the station adhered to any democratic "belief in freedom of the Poles, or faith in the power of democratic ideals to move men's minds," it would support Gomułka.[133] Questioning whether Radio Free Europe intended to uplift and amplify Polish voices or instead to install democratic governments, these statements cut to the core of the station's decisions leading into Gomułka's October.

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132. Holt, 181.

133. R. Sears, "Poland and RFE Policy Decision," November 16, 1956, Folder 10, Box 16, Arch Puddington Collection.

Emphasizing the challenges of identity that the station struggled with since its founding, Gomułka's October presented Radio Free Europe with two clear options. Either, as Frank Altschul noted in 1950, station existed as "the voice of Polish émigré groups" or "the voice of American citizens using émigré groups to the maximum advantage."[134] If representing émigré voices, the station must emphasize Polish support for Gomułka and encourage the revolution, without inciting violence. If serving American interests, the station may override émigré opinion, encouraging a shift away from Gomułka, the Soviet sphere, and communism.

In discussing whether the station would advocate for further revolution, one American researcher postulated that the station was "damned if we do and damned if we don't." Challenging the Station's central mission, the researcher argued "if our goal was or remains to produce crises in communist rule and we justify our existence." Furthering "if the crises do not occur we fail to demonstrate our effectiveness," these statements bluntly acknowledged Radio Free Europe's implicit mission to incite revolution in its broadcast countries.[135] Tracing to the station's early years, this implicit mission called into question whether Radio Free Europe would be considered successful if a revolution did not occur in Poland— even if this is what Poles desired. It was in balancing these questions, and the crisis of the 1956 October Revolution, that Radio Free Europe cemented its Poles-first broadcasting policy. In this, the station not only veered away from inciting defections and encouraging further resistance, but also devoted time, personal, and financial resources to better supporting Polish revolutionary voices during and after October.

134. Johnson, 17.

135. R. Sears, "Poland and RFE Policy Decision," November 16, 1956, Folder 10, Box 16, Arch Puddington Collection.

The decision to support a "cold" revolution in Poland was intentional. Simultaneous to Poland's thaw, October 1956 witnessed a second, more violent, revolution in Hungary. The historical consensus is Radio Free Europe intervened in Hungary in a way that "violated – repeatedly and sometimes flagrantly – many of the accepted canons of professional journalism."[136] While both the Polish and Hungarian desks heavily relied on émigré voices, Hungarian émigrés at Radio Free Europe were less afraid of potential Soviet military action. This is partly because Hungary shared a border with Austria, meaning that it was further removed from the heart of the Soviet sphere. To this end, Hungarians did not fear military intervention from the Soviet Union in the same way that Poland, with "the Russians in the east, inside Poland, and in the west" did.[137] With this, the Hungarian desk suggested that the West would provide military support for Hungary. These broadcasts encouraged a "hot" revolution in Hungary leading up to, and especially during, late October 1956.[138] After much violence, this "hot" revolution ended with Soviet military intervention. While the Hungarian desk broadcasts were not the sole reason for the Soviet crackdown, the Kremlin cited RFE broadcasts as influential in the decision to intervene.

Observing the Hungarian Revolution from afar, the Polish desk expressed fears that "Poland might become ungovernable as Hungary may now be." Anticipating the potential of "violent resistance followed by suppression and then by strikes and passive resistance," the Polish desk opted to stand by listener and émigré calls to support Gomułka's "cold"

136. Puddington, 90-101.

137. House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities, "Testimony of Stanislaw Mikolajczyk," November 17, 1956, Folder 2, Box 77, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk Papers.

138. For a more thorough discussion surrounding the relationship between Radio Free Europe and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, see Johannah Granville, "Caught with Jam in our Fingers: Radio Free Europe and the Hungarian Revolution of 1956," *Diplomatic History*, 29, no. 5 (2005), 838-839.

Revolution.[139] With the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary proving that the threat of military intervention was not empty, the Polish desk used the events in Hungary to justify their pragmatic approach to revolution and a peaceful change of power in Poland.

In addition to monitoring the events in Hungary, the Polish desk continued to draw on listener and émigré feedback to develop its pro-Gomułka position. In late October 1956, a young Polish technician sat down with station interviewers to record his opinions of Gomułka. An active member of the 1956 July riots and broader anti-Soviet movement, the technician also participated in Poznań-inspired protests and other pro-reformist meetings in Warsaw throughout the summer and into early October 1956. Defecting only days prior to Gomułka's return to power, the technician shared with interviewers his opinions on the rapidly evolving political situation in Poland. Urging that "Poles have 'confidence' in Gomułka," the technician held that there was a "solid support and a feeling of trust in the new anti-Russian and anti-Stalinist leader."[140] These feelings were mirrored by a lower-middle class couple from Warsaw, who defected alongside the technician and also shared their experience with the station. While not as supportive of Gomułka, the couple reiterated their desire for an anti-Soviet future, stating "we want Poland for ourselves: the Russians must go."[141]

These testimonies demonstrated the importance of émigré feedback to Radio Free Europe and the 1956 thaw, as the defectors chose to give interviews to the station about the progress of "Gomułka's peaceful revolution" in real time, as the crisis unfolded.[142] Having built a system of trust with Polish listeners and émigrés throughout the early 1950s, and fortifying this trust during

139. R. Sears, "Poland and RFE Policy Decision," November 16, 1956, Folder 10, Box 16, Arch Puddington Collection.

140. GOMUŁKA'S POPULARITY IN POLAND – CONFLICTING REPORTS, October 23, 1956, Folder 161, Jerzy Ptakowski Collection Fonds No. 11.

141. Ibid.

142. Ibid.

the Poznań riots, the station was well poised to serve as a conduit for conversation and dialogue for Poland's "peaceful" revolutionaries. It was in this role as a connector for the Polish community that the station was able to best support a non-violent 1956 Revolution. Drawing on émigré feedback, the station oriented its approach to the October thaw within the desires and aims of Polish listeners.

Third Possibility Broadcasting in Action

In supporting Gomułka, the station adopted a broadcast policy that aligned with Nowak's "third possibility." The first sign of this "third possibility" broadcast policy in action was on October 20, when American administrators, the station's parent organization the Free Europe Committee, and the Polish desk agreed to stop dropping balloons filled with American propaganda in Poland. Determining that it was of primary importance to "keep Gomułka in power and to reduce tensions in Poland," administrators stopped a long-standing staple of propagandistic hardline anticommunist Free Europe Committee propaganda policy in favor of the thaw.[143] The decision to stop balloon drops was rooted in the newly established understanding of Poland's anti-Soviet, pro-communist perspective. Moving forward, the Polish desk continued to develop its listener and émigré-first broadcast policy. In the coming weeks, the station fortified its intelligence-gathering infrastructure, aiming to build strong relationships with Polish émigrés and listeners, while prominent Americans continued to cede power to Poles at the station. This policy encouraged listeners to support the thaw by using the station as a conduit for Polish voices rather than a platform for American propaganda.

"Third possibility" broadcasting policy was again exemplified in the station's unveiling of "Project Shiftover" in late October 1956. Announced in the days following the Soviet arrival

143. Machewicz, 66-67.

at the Eighth Plenum, Project Shiftover explicitly prioritized the importance of émigré and Polish voices following Gomułka's election. Increasing the station's monitoring of Polish magazines and radio programs, Shiftover focused on improving access to Polish media outlets. In its mission statement, Shiftover promised to "exploit for RFE purposes the increased amount of information" from regime press, radio, and Polish émigrés sources that were "now available as a result of the 'thaw'."[144] Intending to strengthen communication between Poles in Poland and Polish émigrés, Shiftover also emphasized the importance of interviews with émigrés leaving during the thaw. In this, Shiftover prioritized lower and middle class Polish voices with the hope of gaining a better understanding of grassroots politics. Designating "sports teams, relatives, journalists, businessmen," as part of this "lower-level" group of émigrés, the program aimed to build these relationships by drawing on existing relationships with the émigré community.[145]

In prioritizing the importance of connecting with émigrés from all strata of society and emphasizing the importance of placing Polish safety first, the station developed Project Shiftover using a "Poles-first" mentality. Focusing on the comfort and needs of Poles helping the station, rather than solely the information that these émigrés could provide, Radio Free Europe demonstrated a commitment to its émigré interviewees. In example, Shiftover prioritized émigré privacy. While increasing émigré interviews, the Station took careful measures to protect these interviewees without jeopardizing their families, who were often still in Poland.[146] Though Shiftover also improved the station's understanding of Polish public opinion, its sole purpose was not about gaining intelligence. Instead, Shiftover marked a commitment to Polish émigré experience when interacting with Radio Free Europe.

144. PROJECT SHIFTOVER, October 1956, Folder 1, Box 3, Arch Puddington Collection.
145. Ibid.
146. Ibid.

Project Shiftover also reflected the station's financial commitment to the Polish desk. As a part of Shiftover, American administrators expanded the Polish desk's budget by an additional $83,000--- a sum equal to roughly $744,000 in 2017. In addition, Shiftover created six new jobs for Poles at the Station to help with the Polish researching, writing, and translating teams, alongside another two positions for general editors.[147] In expanding the Polish desk's budget and personnel, Shiftover created an internal infrastructure that affirmed the Station's commitment to émigré contributors. As the first major change in station policy after the Eighth Plenum, Shiftover cemented an explicit station policy confirming that Radio Free Europe was committed to Polish public opinion. In this, Shiftover allowed the Polish desk the bandwidth to improve its intelligence abilities and relationships with the émigré community.

In addition to Project Shiftover, the Station also unveiled Project Dividend, a program that aimed to improve relations with "high-level non-refugee sources of current information" on Poland.[148] Focusing on the experiences of high-profile Polish leaders who conducted business in the West, Dividend hoped to expand the station's knowledge of Polish-elite public opinion. Aiming to better coordinate and control relations with these elites, Dividend sought to build relationships with "regime officials, delegation members, journalists, and other well informed persons traveling with official authorization to Western Europe."[149] Creating a special fund to finance "priority cases of persons coming from Eastern Europe," Dividend made it financially easier for high-level Poles to visit or defect to the West and interview with Radio Free Europe.[150] Investing over $25,000 in Dividend, or roughly $224,000 in 2017, the station made a second

147. PROJECT SHIFTOVER, October 1956, Folder 1, Box 3, Arch Puddington Collection, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California.

148. PROJECT DIVIDEND, October 1956, Folder 1, Box 3, Arch Puddington Collection, The Hoover Institution at Stanford University, Palo Alto, California.

149. Ibid.

150. Ibid.

financial commitment to increasing émigré and Polish input. As a "third possibility" broadcasting policy, Dividend restructured the Station's intelligence networks and increased its capacity to conduct interviews with Poles. In expanding these interviews to include more elite citizens, Dividend reflected a desire to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Polish reactions to the anti-Stalinist movement and Gomułka's thaw.

Programs like Projects Dividend and Shiftover reinforced the importance of Polish input to Radio Free Europe. A vote of confidence in émigré opinions, these programs were the station's first official policy of émigré-centered, Poles-first reporting. Implemented in the weeks following Gomułka's election, Shiftover and Dividend demonstrate the station's quick reaction to the events at the Eighth Plenum. Moving beyond indecision, the station quickly and effectively transitioned Nowak's "third possibility" into actionable procedures with the necessary financial backing to be effective.

Polish Media Support for Radio Free Europe

With improved access to Polish public opinion through Dividend and Shiftover, alongside previous intelligence gathering mechanisms, the station was better able to gauge Polish public support. In this, the station also gained greater insight into how the thaw was impacting Polish broadcasts and regime jamming efforts. Over the course of 1956 Polish media outlets increasingly acknowledged Radio Free Europe's role in encouraging Gomułka's thaw. Inspiring local news outlets to express anti-Stalinist beliefs, Radio Free Europe encouraged more democratic media across Poland in 1956.

The thaw in Polish broadcasting and news correlated with a spike in references to Radio Free Europe by Polish media outlets. By October 1956 Polish news outlets "acknowledged that

Western broadcasts recognized the importance of the changes taking place in Poland."[151] In this, Polish media lauded Radio Free Europe for "keeping the spirit of freedom alive in Poland.[152] Recognizing Radio Free Europe for its role in facilitating public conversation, these statements confirmed the importance of Western broadcasts in facilitating the 1956 thaw.

Within Polish radio stations this thaw was part of a longer trend that slowly developed over the course of 1956. References to Radio Free Europe by Polish radio stations doubled between August and September 1956.[153] The increased attention to the Western station in the months following Poznań is significant. While many of these references likely attacked Radio Free Europe broadcasts, most references to Radio Free Europe prior to October were more conversational. In many references, Radio Free Europe served as an entry point for further conversations discussing the merits of "democratization."[154] Allowing Polish public radio stations to discuss political change using the veiled context of Western media, Radio Free Europe provided a safe way for Polish media to begin to consider what democratization of the press would look like.

Expanding beyond Polish radio outlets, Polish magazines and newspapers also began to criticize the regime and acknowledge the importance of Radio Free Europe throughout 1956. Notes at the Polish desk confirmed that "since the beginning of the year (there was) an immense increase in the number of press and magazine articles and radio broadcasts criticizing the regime."[155] Praising particular magazines, such as *Nowa Kultura* and *Po Prostu* for serving as

151. Radio Free Europe, "Audience Analysis Monthly Report, October 1956," October 1956, Folder 1, Box 44, Imre Kovacs Papers.

152. Radio Free Europe, "Audience Analysis Monthly Report, October 1956," October 1956, Folder 1, Box 44, Imre Kovacs Papers.

153. Radio Free Europe, "Audience Analysis Monthly Report, September 1956," September 1956, Folder 2, Box 26, Imre Kovacs Papers.

154. Ibid.

155. PROJECT SHIFTOVER, October 1956, Folder 1, Box 3, Arch Puddington Collection.

"early … mouthpieces for the thaw," the Polish desk noted that, by October, most "all press and radio organs now appear to be under control of the pro-liberalization groups."[156]

The liberalization of the media marked the first time that Radio Free Europe's broadcasts were consistently confirmed, instead of attacked, by Polish media. In this, Radio Free Europe could report without fear of Polish media discounting their broadcasts. This was a new position for Radio Free Europe, which until this point spent much of its airtime denouncing critiques from the Polish media.

Reinforcing the importance of Radio Free Europe's broadcasts, Polish media outlets began to praise the Western station's on-air reporting. This deference to Radio Free Europe manifested itself in the wake of the Eighth Plenum, with *Po Prostu* writing that "the announcement of the Soviet delegation's arrival was made by our radio long after (it was heard on) foreign radio stations."[157] Recognizing Radio Free Europe's broadcasting for its quick and accurate reports, this instance illustrates the increasingly amiable relationship between Polish media and RFE. Treating Radio Free Europe as more than a peripheral American station, *Po Prostu* presented the Western station as one of the country's chief, central news outlets. Corroborating listener testimonies and Radio Free Europe's own impact analyses, this statement confirmed Radio Free Europe's status as a central and admired news source.

This rise in support for Radio Free Europe and the liberalization of Polish media occurred alongside a change in government jamming policy. Jamming was a central issue of the Poznań riots, when protesters destroyed jamming equipment while chanting "We want to listen to the outside world unjammed!"[158] On October 17, the chairman of Polish Radio announced to the

156. Ibid.

157. Radio Free Europe, "Audience Analysis Monthly Report, October 1956," October 1956, Folder 1, Box 44, Imre Kovacs Papers.

158. Machewicz, *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe: 1950-1989*, 78.

Sejm that "the liquidation of jamming of foreign broadcasts would save 83 million złotys which are spent annually on this operation."[159] In this, the Radio chair suggested that there were financial, as well as a social, incentives to end jamming efforts. The issue was contentious, however, with Gomułka noting after the Eighth Plenum that Radio Free Europe's programs would be jammed as long as they "have absolutely no relation to the truth."[160]

Yet even Gomułka did not have a full understanding of public support for Radio Free Europe, with local stations seeking ways to improve access to the Western station for listeners. On October 29, Radio Kraków announced that it would stop jamming foreign radio stations. Framing the announcement within the context of public opinion, the Kraków station added that "the workers of the central administration of the Kraków radio station express their solidarity with public opinion in the Kraków voivodship."[161] The Kraków station's decision openly disobeyed Gomułka and reinforced the importance of public opinion on Radio Free Europe's success. Ultimately, the Polish government could not ignore this public support for Radio Free Europe. In December, the Polish government ended jamming efforts nationwide.[162] The end of jamming efforts paved the way for more Poles to gain access to Radio Free Europe, thereby extending the station's impact. Perhaps more importantly, however, the end of jamming was a publically-driven effort. In flouting Gomułka's directives to jam Radio Free Europe, Polish listeners further endorsed Radio Free Europe's role in facilitating the thaw. In this, the end of jamming demonstrated the strength of public mobilization in support of the Western station.

159. Radio Free Europe, "Audience Analysis Monthly Report, October 1956," October 1956, Folder 1, Box 44, Imre Kovacs Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Columbia University, New York, NY.

160. Machewicz, *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe: 1950-1989*, 79.

161. Radio Free Europe, "Audience Analysis Monthly Report, October 1956," October 1956, Folder 1, Box 44, Imre Kovacs Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Columbia University, New York, NY.

162. Machewicz, *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe: 1950-1989*, 79.

At-large, Polish support for Radio Free Europe, both through domestic news outlets and through anti-jamming efforts, reaffirmed the importance of the Western station to the 1956 thaw. Listeners took action to preserve the Western station's authority thereby, demonstrating the importance of Radio Free Europe to its Polish listeners. In ending jamming and on-air critiques of Radio Free Europe broadcasts, and publically crediting Radio Free Europe for its work, Polish media validated the importance of Radio Free Europe. Bringing Radio Free Europe into the fold of Polish news outlets, the Polish media confirmed the station's importance to a "third possibility" revolution.

The Success of Poles-First Broadcasting

In contemplating the 1956 thaw, Jan Nowak was quick to emphasize the importance of public opinion. Noting that not even Gomułka could take credit for the Revolution, Nowak attributed the thaw to a "popular movement" that drew on "increasing popular participating in governing the country."[163] In this, Nowak, attributes the success of the 1956 Revolution to the Polish people. Nowak's statements can be applied to Radio Free Europe as well. It was only through its Poles-first broadcasting mechanism that Radio Free Europe was able to facilitate a "third possibility" Revolution.

Magnifying Polish public opinion and providing a venue to connect émigré voices with Poles in Poland, Radio Free Europe was an ideal conduit for Polish conversation surrounding the Revolution. In October 1956, American administrators expanded on and legitimized the Poles-first broadcasting method that it developed over the course of the first half of the 1950s. Opting to use Polish opinion as the outline for station-wide policy, Radio Free Europe entrenched the importance of émigré opinion in its station policies. Programs such as Shiftover and Dividend

163. Jan Nowak, "Analysis of Developments in Poland since October 1956," May 14, 1956, Folder 6, Box 1768, Radio Free Europe Corporate Collection.

made financial commitments to émigré and Polish voices. Ultimately, the importance of Radio Free Europe to the Revolution was clarified through feedback from Polish radio stations and the end of jamming itself.

In 1957, the station adopted a more long-term policy applauding émigrés for their role in the anti-Stalinist Revolution. Acknowledging the importance of adhering to the "ultimate desires or well-being of the Polish people," the station noted that the preservation of the freedoms earned during the Revolution would only persist should they continue to rely on "Polish émigré individuals … whose talents and activities are of interest to the Polish audience." [164] A year after the Eighth Plenum, these statements demonstrated the lasting impact of 1956 in building a station rooted in émigré reporting. Crediting reformed communism to Polish and émigré voices, the station recognized that Radio Free Europe would only be successful in its mission if it served as a mouthpiece for Poles and by Poles.

164. "Special Guidance No. 29 on RFE Broadcasts to Poland," September 30, 1957, Folder 10, Box 66, Arch Puddington Collection.

CONCLUSION:
A REVOLUTIONARY PRECEDENT

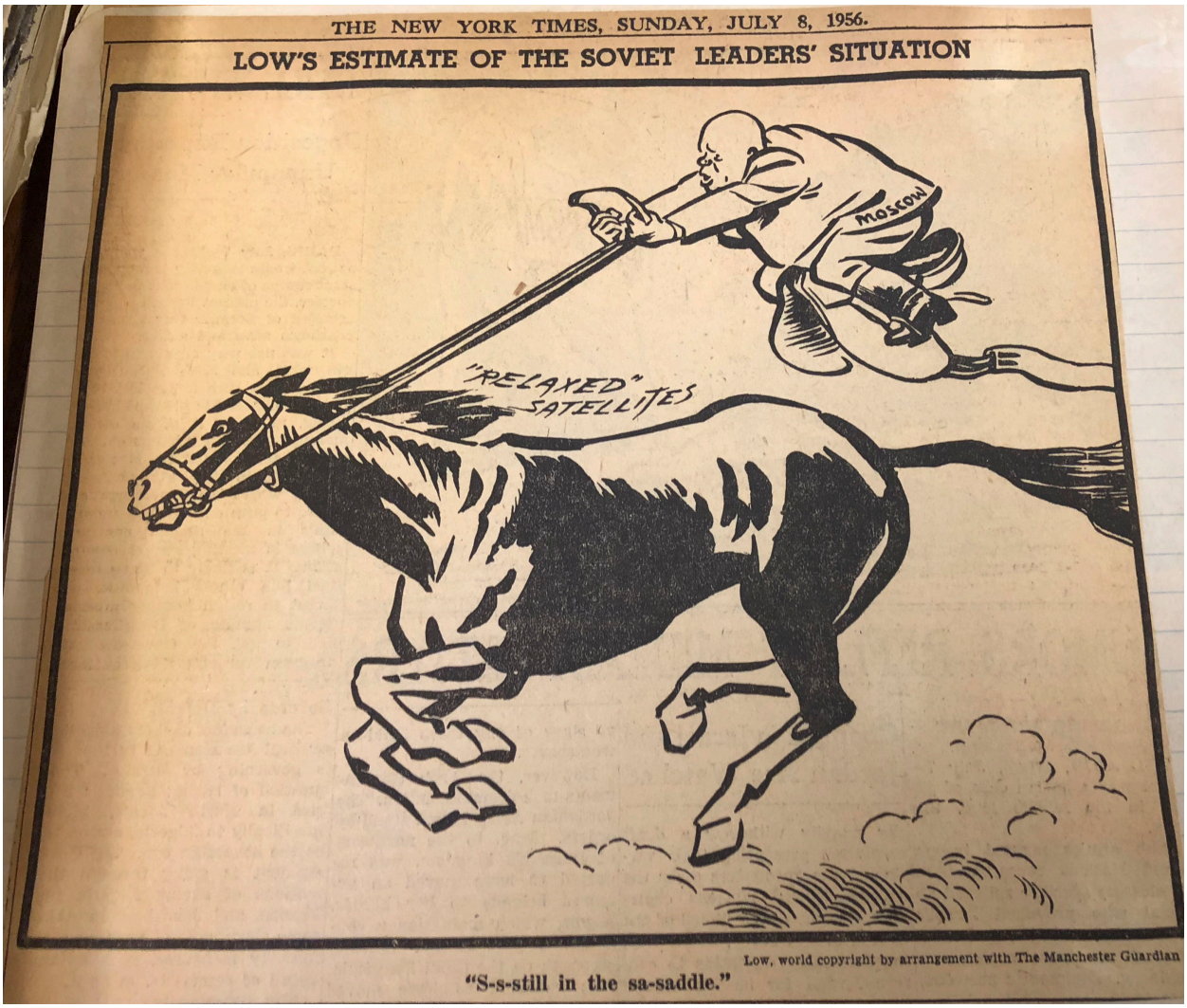

Figure 10: A cartoon published following the Poznań Riots mocking Khrushchev and Moscow's increasing loss of control over the satellite regimes. Cartoon, *The New York Times*, July 8, 1956, Collection 36, Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences of the Americas Archives, New York, New York.

In the weeks following the Eighth Plenum the domestic Polish magazine *Po Prostu* published an article contemplating the events that occurred in the wake of Gomułka's election. "What has happened in our country?" the article questioned. "To put it plainly and clearly, it might as well be said that the country has experienced a revolution. An actual economic-

political, social and ideological revolution."[165] In making the jump to classify the thaw as a revolution, rather than a popular social movement or a political crisis, the government-supported *Po Prostu* made a claim that historians, politicians, and Radio Free Europe continue to debate. While the classification of the 1956 crisis remains contested, it is undeniable that the Poznań riots, subsequent thaw, and Gomułka's October aligned to tangibly and forcibly challenge Stalinist ideology. Evading the threat of Soviet military intervention, Poland's 1956 marked a "cold" revolution with the potential for lasting, but gradual, political change.

This revolution would not be possible, however, without Radio Free Europe's ability to connect Polish public opinion and émigré voices through the airwaves. Creating a space for listener and uniquely Polish voices to advocate their opinions, uncensored by the Polish government's censorship, Radio Free Europe offered a forum for the 1956 Revolution to occur within. The success of this Polish forum is especially relevant in comparison with the station's failure in Hungary. While the Hungarian desk devolved into low morale, "finger pointing," and increased State Department guidance in the years following 1956, the Polish desk remained an example of model reporting.[166] Expanding on the Poles-helping-Poles model that fueled the desk's reporting during the crisis, Poles at the station moved to help their fellow East European émigrés at Radio Free Europe.

Nowak used the rapport and esteem that he built over the course of the Polish crisis to advocate on behalf of the Hungarians to the American administration. Under Nowak's guidance, the Polish desk drafted a petition threatening to resign en masse if the station implemented censorship measures against the Hungarian desk. The petition was successful, and with Nowak

165. Ryszard Turski and Eligiusz Lasota, "The Polish October," *Po Prostu*, October 28, 1956, Folder 75, Radio Free Europe Collection, Fonds No. 36.

166. Puddington, 117.

and the Polish desk's assistance Hungarian émigrés retained relative autonomy in broadcasts.[167] This development is especially telling, as it reveals the authority and respect American station leadership granted the Poles following the 1956 revolution. Having incited Soviet intervention, to be sure, the Hungary desk required American administrative oversight in some capacity. Yet in ceding some of this administrative authority to the Polish desk, the American administration demonstrated its trust in and respect for the Polish journalists. The Polish émigré-first model served as the framework for each of the station's national reporting bureaus moving forward.

Radio Free Europe continued to amend its hiring and reporting policies in light of the Polish revolution throughout the remainder of the 1950s. Under the Polish model, the station did not face another major public scandal throughout the rest of the Cold War. Following 1956, American station directors in Munich and New York remained attentive to émigré opinions and habitually received summaries of interviews with Polish defectors, émigrés, and Poles in Poland.[168] Continuing to advocate for a policy of cautious liberation, the station vowed to "maintain the very delicate balance in which it informs and supports the Polish people in defending and, if possible, expanding their relative freedoms while accurately indicating the moves by the regime which demonstrably are working against freedom."[169] In classifying its role as informing and supporting Poles, the station's American administration demonstrated a better understanding of its role as a forum for Polish voices.

Radio Free Europe also remembered the tenacity of the 1956 Polish desk and the example of the American administrators who ceded authority to these Poles. This influence was evident in

167. Puddington, 117.

168. Paul Henze to W.J. Convery Egan, "Recent performance of the Polish desk; the Control Problem," September 5, 1957, Box 12, Folder 18, Paul Henze Papers.

169. "RFE Broadcasting Policy Toward Poland," November 30, 1959, Box 16, Folder 10, Arch Puddington Collection.

the impact of the station's 1956 staff on subsequent changes in US State Department interests. A member of the station's policy staff since its founding, William Griffith was first hired in the early 1950s with little knowledge or insight on East European affairs. In 1959 Griffith resigned from his position of Policy Director to pursue a career at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as a specialist on communism. Alongside Griffith, Paul Henze returned to the United States for a position at the State Department. The American administrative team during the 1956 revolution was credited with persuading "the State Department that Poland, not Hungary, was most important, and most vulnerable, of the satellite states."[170] This shift in emphasis would not be possible without these American administrators' recognition of émigré-first reporting in 1956. In successfully shifting the State Department's gaze to Poland, Griffith, Henze, and this American cohort used their authority to create a larger platform for Polish voices. Praised for making the Munich Office a hub of research, intelligence, and culture, these American administrators ultimately used their power to shift attention from American foreign policy to the Eastern Europeans whom Radio Free Europe was established to serve.

The memory of Radio Free Europe in Poland's 1956 remained etched in the minds of Polish reform-minded circles, as well. That memory was not always positive. Wary of Radio Free Europe throughout the 1950s, Solidarity leader and, later, editor-in-chief of the post-communist newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* Adam Michnik feared the émigré "who, for American money, told lies about Poland on Radio Free Europe." Initially wary of inconsistencies between émigré and Polish understandings of reform, Michnik's worries subsided with time as he discovered "masses of people" listening to the station "for honest news about their own country."[171] Michnik's hesitancy only underscores the power of the relationship between Polish

170. Puddington, 116.
171. Nelson, 158.

émigrés and Poles in Poland. Demonstrating that this relationship required proven dedication on both sides, 1956 was vital to solidifying Michnik's and general Polish support for Radio Free Europe. This support proved fundamental to the success of Solidarity, with organizer Bronislaw Geremek praising Nowak for paving the way for Solidarity. "We are here thanks to him," Geremek noted in reference to Nowak as he attributed the success of information loops, organizing, and émigré-Polish relations in the 1980s to the 1956 movement.[172]

Radio Free Europe's Polish reporting in the early 1950s and in 1956 was essential to the broader arc of Polish communist politics. The 1956 crisis instilled a new respect for Polish public opinion within American foreign policy actors and administrators at Radio Free Europe, which persisted throughout the station's Cold War broadcasting. Providing a venue for émigrés and Poles in Poland to connect in conversation, serving as an alternative to party-dominated domestic media, and encouraging discourse on communist reform, the Polish desk established a precedent for a "cold" revolution. This template influenced the station's reporting and Polish organizing for years to come. Securing a permanent shift from Stalinist policies, the station's role in securing a "third possibility" revolution remained a vital roadmap for the long-term trajectory of communism in Poland.

172. Ibid, 160.

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